

**BRINGING CHINA IN:
INTERNATIONAL ORDER AND THE ROLE OF THE GREAT POWERS**

BY
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A THESIS PRESENTED TO THE FACULTY OF
THE SCHOOL OF ADVANCED AIR AND SPACE STUDIES
FOR COMPLETION OF GRADUATION REQUIREMENTS

SCHOOL OF ADVANCED AIR AND SPACE STUDIES
AIR UNIVERSITY
MAXWELL AIR FORCE BASE, ALABAMA
JUNE 2013

Report Documentation Page			<i>Form Approved OMB No. 0704-0188</i>	
<p>Public reporting burden for the collection of information is estimated to average 1 hour per response, including the time for reviewing instructions, searching existing data sources, gathering and maintaining the data needed, and completing and reviewing the collection of information. Send comments regarding this burden estimate or any other aspect of this collection of information, including suggestions for reducing this burden, to Washington Headquarters Services, Directorate for Information Operations and Reports, 1215 Jefferson Davis Highway, Suite 1204, Arlington VA 22202-4302. Respondents should be aware that notwithstanding any other provision of law, no person shall be subject to a penalty for failing to comply with a collection of information if it does not display a currently valid OMB control number.</p>				
1. REPORT DATE JUN 2013	2. REPORT TYPE	3. DATES COVERED 00-00-2013 to 00-00-2013		
4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE Bringing China In: International Order And The Role Of The Great Powers				
5a. CONTRACT NUMBER 5b. GRANT NUMBER 5c. PROGRAM ELEMENT NUMBER				
6. AUTHOR(S) 				
5d. PROJECT NUMBER 5e. TASK NUMBER 5f. WORK UNIT NUMBER				
7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) School Of Advanced Air And Space Studies,,Air University,,Maxwell Air Force Base,,AL				
8. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER				
9. SPONSORING/MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES)				
10. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S ACRONYM(S)				
11. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S REPORT NUMBER(S)				
12. DISTRIBUTION/AVAILABILITY STATEMENT Approved for public release; distribution unlimited				
13. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES				
14. ABSTRACT <p>Can China learn to behave like an ordinary, status-quo great power? That is a big question that many are concerned with today. This study works along those lines by examining China???s behavior during the Korean War and its on-again, off-again relationship with North Korea today. The central premise is: Great powers play the dominant role in creating, sustaining, and maintaining international order. Since China is a great power, it assumes that China can and will learn to behave as such. By assuming an ordinary or supporter role, China can help bolster international norms and establish the ???rules of the game??? necessary for the continuation of the society of states. In short, conflict might be one outcome of China???s rise but it is not pre-determined. While China has yet to become a full-fledged supporter of the existing international order, the overall contour of its behavior suggests, heuristically, that it might. And, that is both interesting and important.</p>				
15. SUBJECT TERMS				
16. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF:			17. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT Same as Report (SAR)	18. NUMBER OF PAGES 52
a. REPORT unclassified	b. ABSTRACT unclassified	c. THIS PAGE unclassified	19a. NAME OF RESPONSIBLE PERSON	

APPROVAL

The undersigned certify that this thesis meets master's-level standards or research, argumentation, and expression.

JAMES W. FORSYTH (Date)

JAMES D. KIRAS (Date)

DISCLAIMER

The conclusions and opinions expressed in this document are those of the author. They do not reflect the official position of the US Government, Department of Defense, the United States Air Force, or Air University.

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to acknowledge several people without whose support and help this study would have been much more difficult and far less applicable to my professional growth. I owe a special debt of gratitude to Dr. Jim Forsyth whose insights, availability, and leadership shaped my thinking in many positive ways and kept me focused on the prize. I also appreciate the review and editing done by Dr. James Kiras who added insight and polish to the finished product.

Most importantly, I want to express my sincere appreciation to my wife and our children for their love, patience, and understanding during those times when I was absent in spirit, working on this paper. They are my world, and it is their love reflecting God's love that enables me to come to work each day with a smile.

ABSTRACT

Can China learn to behave like an ordinary, status-quo great power? That is a big question that many are concerned with today. This study works along those lines by examining China's behavior during the Korean War and its on-again, off-again relationship with North Korea today. The central premise is: Great powers play the dominant role in creating, sustaining, and maintaining international order. Since China is a great power, it assumes that China can and will learn to behave as such. By assuming an ordinary or supporter role, China can help bolster international norms and establish the "rules of the game" necessary for the continuation of the society of states. In short, conflict might be one outcome of China's rise but it is not pre-determined. While China has yet to become a full-fledged supporter of the existing international order, the overall contour of its behavior suggests, heuristically, that it might. And, that is both interesting and important.

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INTRODUCTION

Today we have learned in the agony of war that great power involves great responsibility.

Franklin D. Roosevelt

To whom much has been given, much will be expected.

Luke 12:48

In 1948, sociologist Robert Merton coined the term “self-fulfilling prophecy” in an article by the same name.¹ Although the concept of a self-fulfilling prophecy can be traced to literature as far back as ancient Greece, it was Merton who first formalized its structure and consequences.² He writes, a “self-fulfilling prophecy is, in the beginning, a *false* definition of the situation evoking a new behavior which makes the original false conception come ‘true.’ This specious validity of the self-fulfilling prophecy perpetuates a reign of error. For the prophet will cite the actual course of events as proof that he was right from the very beginning.”³ In the field of sociology, a self-fulfilling prophecy is often expressed in the following terms: if Abby falsely believes her marriage is doomed to fail, her belief in the inevitability of failure actually *causes* her marriage to fail. Merton used the collapse of the banking industry in the 1930s and racial strife in the 1960s to demonstrate how this perverse social logic can have dramatic effects on an entire society.⁴ If renowned international relations theorist Hedley Bull is correct in his assertion that international order is founded upon a society of states, it is plausible that states at times conform to the structure and consequences of sociology.⁵ It follows that the US must be discerning in its dealings with China to avoid creating a self-fulfilling prophecy prejudiced toward conflict based on a false definition of the situation. The remedy is fairly straightforward, but nevertheless difficult: to correctly define the

¹ Robert K. Merton, "The Self-Fulfilling Prophecy," *The Antioch Review* 8, no. 2 (1948), 193.

² Robert K. Merton, *Social Theory and Social Structure* (New York: Free Press, 1968), 477.

³ Merton, *Social Theory and Social Structure*, 477.

⁴ Merton, *Social Theory and Social Structure*, 478.

⁵ Hedley Bull, *The Anarchical Society: A Study of Order in World Politics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), 3, 8.

situation and then behave in a manner consistent with that understanding. This thesis is a step in that direction.

The Problem and Its Setting

At present, the US sits atop a world that is largely the product of its own making. Great sacrifices of blood and treasure are the bedrock that order has been founded upon. Those sacrifices have earned America great rights within the international community, but those rights have also come with great responsibilities. Throughout much of the world, the US has been the only great power willing and able to set the agenda and provide public goods on a global scale. However, in light of declining budgets that are likely to be a long-term fixture in America's foreign policy, over-extension is a matter of great concern. A major component of the future US strategy centers on cost-sharing with other nations such as China, a country second only to the US in terms of power and influence.⁶ The US has gone so far as to use its traditionally hawkish National Military Strategy to emphasize that America "seeks a positive, cooperative, and comprehensive relationship with China that welcomes it to take on a responsible leadership role."⁷ However, US policymakers are somewhat apprehensive about how China would handle increased global responsibility if the US was inclined to delegate some of the international responsibility it has gained through difficult sacrifices and decades of global leadership. America's willingness to delegate responsibility, and by extension, power, is predicated on an assessment that China is capable of behaving responsibly, thereby supporting the international order that America has played such a big part in building.

In making that assessment, one significant form of assurance derives from China's previous track record as a great power. Tracing the rise of China from its rebirth as a nation in 1949 to today reveals a significant transformation in the way China has viewed international order. Mao Zedong's view of international order when he entered the Korean War was one of revolution. He joined forces with Kim Il Sung not only to

⁶ Office of the President of the United States, "National Security Strategy of the United States," (Washington, DC: White House, 2010), 3.

⁷ United States Department of Defense, "US National Military Strategy," (Washington, DC: Dept. of Defense, 2011), 14.

catalyze Korea's revolution, but also in the hope of sparking worldwide revolution.⁸ Spoiling the existing world order and ushering in a new one was fundamental to his vision.⁹ Sixty years later, China's handling of the North Korean nuclear program demonstrates a significant departure in Beijing's vision of international order from the days of Mao.¹⁰

This thesis examines the rise of China and its impact on international order. In so doing, it seeks to answer the following question: Can China learn to behave like an ordinary or responsible great power? The two cases under consideration here seem to suggest that China can and will learn to behave in such a manner. Of course, there are no guarantees that it will; conflict is also a real possibility. But it is shortsighted to conclude that "China cannot rise peacefully." In fact, it can and it might.

Preview of the Argument

China has yet to become a full-fledged supporter of the existing order but its overall trend has been a shift in vision from that of spoiling the international order to one of supporting it. The argument for this thesis unfolds as follows. Chapter one examines whether China is a great power and what, if any, roles great powers are expected to play in the international community. Relying heavily on the work of Hedley Bull, the English School, and other international relations theorists, this study concludes that the international community expects great powers to act responsibly in maintaining stability within the existing order. In a word, responsible behavior is normative. The US needs China to operate by accepted international norms. Bull helps define those norms by illuminating the fact that great powers play a dominant role in maintaining international order. Each role contributes to the great powers' abilities to manage relations amongst themselves and provide central direction to international affairs.¹¹ The roles that great powers play with respect to international order flow directly into the theoretical framework that interweaves throughout this study. Randall Schweller and Xiaoyu Pu

⁸ John Lewis Gaddis, *The Cold War : A New History* (New York: Penguin Press, 2005), 38.

⁹ Jian Chen, *China's Road to the Korean War : The Making of the Sino-American Confrontation* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 215.

¹⁰ Jae Ho Chung, "Decoding the Evolutionary Path of Chinese Foreign Policy, 1949-2009: Assessments and Inferences," *East Asia* 28, no. 3 (2011), 176-177.

¹¹ Bull, *The Anarchical Society: A Study of Order in World Politics*, 220-221.

propose a framework in which emerging poles in the international system may choose to be spoilers, supporters, or shirkers. Spoilers seek a new international order by destroying the existing one. Supporters share in the responsibility of managing the existing order, while shirkers seek the privileges of power in the existing order but eschew the associated responsibilities of contributing to global governance.¹² Thus, the task before us is to discern whether China is trending toward or away from being a responsible supporter of the international order.

Chapter two examines the PRC's entry into the Korean War to evaluate whether Mao was a supporter of the bipolar Cold War order or a spoiler seeking its overthrow through worldwide revolution. To assess Mao's intentions, the study looks at why he chose to enter the Korean War. When China entered the Korean War by sending troops south of the Yalu River on October 19, 1950, the Chinese Communist regime made the decision despite enormous domestic problems. In its first year of existence, the PRC was still trying to achieve domestic political consolidation, rebuild a war-shattered economy, and finish unifying the country.¹³ Despite these domestic problems, initial scholarship widely held that Beijing's entrance into the Korean War was a supporter strategy, subordinate to Moscow's Cold War strategy. However, given later access to Mao's writings and those of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), this argument eventually lost sway.¹⁴ As more evidence came to light, it has become increasingly clear that Mao was intent on spreading revolution throughout the world. Therefore, contemporary scholarship tends to view the 1950s era China as a spoiler of the international system which entered the war willingly with the intent to support worldwide revolution.¹⁵

Chapter three evaluates how China has used its role in North Korea in an attempt to support the existing order by influencing Pyongyang's quest for nuclear weapons. In

¹² Randall L. Schweller and Xiaoyu Pu, "After Unipolarity : China's Visions of International Order in an Era of U.S. Decline," *International Security* 36, no. 1 (2011), 42.

¹³ Chen, *China's Road to the Korean War : The Making of the Sino-American Confrontation*, 1.

¹⁴ Gaddis, *The Cold War : A New History*. 38. See also Chen, *China's Road to the Korean War : The Making of the Sino-American Confrontation*, 2.

¹⁵ Chen, *China's Road to the Korean War : The Making of the Sino-American Confrontation*, 218.

2003, North Korea pulled out of the Non-proliferation Treaty (NPT).¹⁶ From that point forward, international initiatives toward denuclearization in North Korea have been replete with periods of crisis, stalemate, and tentative progress. However, the dominant trend has been a continual pursuit of nuclear weapons which has culminated in three successful nuclear tests between 2006 and 2013.¹⁷ The one bright spot in the North Korean nuclear saga has been China's initiative in leading the Six-Party Talks, which were aimed at denuclearization of the Korean peninsula. Beijing has consistently favored diplomacy over more coercive measures, telling the international community that its influence over the Kim regime is insufficient to force their hand. Furthermore, China has stated that more forceful methods against North Korea will further destabilize the already fragile regime. Because China has prioritized stability in North Korea over denuclearization, it has been reluctant to impose crippling sanctions on the Kim regime. Some believe China is shirking its responsibilities as a great power, calling into question its ability to act as an ordinary great power in support of the existing international order. Others point to Beijing's leadership role in the Six-Party Talks and argue that China is perhaps more committed than anyone to solving the problem, but has chosen a non-Western approach. Whether more diplomacy or tougher sanctions is a more efficacious strategy for China to pursue is a debate that has yet to be resolved. Although there may be ambiguity in China's response, one thing is clear: China is ready and willing to exercise a greater leadership role in East Asia and in the international community writ large.

The final chapter argues that the US is hesitant to pass greater leadership responsibilities to China in East Asia because Washington is still uncertain as to what kind of leadership it can expect from Beijing. Many see a “security dilemma” with China in which the safest approach is to assume that China's intentions are adversarial toward the US. Although China has significant differences with the US, conflict is not predetermined, and therefore, the prospects of it should not drive America's foreign

¹⁶ International Atomic Energy Commission, "IAEA and DPRK," (2009), http://www.iaea.org/newscenter/focus/iaeadprk/fact_sheet_may2003.shtml.

¹⁷ Benjamin Habib, "North Korea's Nuclear Weapons Programme and the Maintenance of the Songun System," *The Pacific Review* 24, no. 1 (2011), 52. See also Kelsey Davenport, "The U.S.-North Korean Agreed Framework at a Glance," *Arms Control Association* (August 2004), <http://www.armscontrol.org/factsheets/agreedframework>.

policy. America's response to China, be it engagement or containment, will significantly color Beijing's perception of US intentions in East Asia. The US has an open, but finite, window to engage China and seek its deeper integration within the international system. The US would do well to recognize China's growing status in the world and allow Beijing greater freedom to exercise both its rights and responsibilities in the region. Although China has moved considerably along the spectrum from spoiler to supporter, much work remains to be done. For the US to relinquish additional influence in East Asia, it must be sure of China's intentions to act responsibly. Concrete steps such as greater military-to-military cooperation are positive signs that the US and China are committed to reducing misunderstandings, misperceptions, and mistakes between the two countries. As the US and China gain a clearer understanding of one another, cooperation on tough international issues will become increasingly possible and even likely. On issues such as violent extremism, non-proliferation, and free trade, China's leadership is no longer "nice to have," it is a "must have."

Significance

This study is relevant to students of policy, strategy, and military planning as they consider future diplomatic and military approaches toward China. If China is likely to act as a responsible great power, supporting the existing international order, then it behooves the US to seek greater rights and responsibilities for China as it continues to rise. America's decision to either engage or contain China based off its assessment of Beijing's ability to act responsibly bears directly on whether the US is likely to avert acute conflict with China as it continues to rise. This study fills in one small piece of the larger puzzle in making that assessment from an informed perspective.

Limitations

This study is, however, limited by opaqueness in Beijing about its actual intentions within the international community. Therefore, this study is more heuristic relying on inferences suggestive of China's behavior. Where available, this study does assess China's stated foreign policy in broad terms. Because Chinese government documents are predominantly published in Mandarin, this study relies extensively on secondary sources where Chinese foreign policy is concerned. Additionally, the information used is at the unclassified level. The author is aware that significant

preparation occurs at increased levels of security, whether restricted or classified. This thesis is unable to assess those efforts. In the end, one has to make do with information publically available and I have tried to do a fair and balanced assessment.

CHAPTER 1

Great Power as a Role

In 1993, basketball superstar Charles Barkley quipped, “I am not a role model.” Interestingly, that same year, Gatorade commercials told aspiring athletes: “be like Mike,” referring to Michael Jordan. Whether superstars want to accept the role demanded by their fame is irrelevant; they are role models, whether good or bad, based solely on their status within society. The international system is not altogether different. In a like manner, states which rise in status to the top of the society of states have a distinct role to play whether they eschew the responsibility of that role or not. That role is the role of ‘great power.’ In this chapter I argue that great power is a role within the international system, I illuminate the rights and responsibilities of great powers, and evaluate whether China is likely to behave like an ordinary great power in the future.

Great Responsibles

Social scientists have widely agreed on who the great powers have been in each era of history even though they have not always reached consensus on exactly how to define the term “great power.” Observing how great powers have behaved through history sheds light on what a great power is. For instance, there is broad agreement that the great powers prior to World War I (WWI) were Britain, France, Russia, Germany, Austria-Hungary, Italy, the United States, and Japan.¹ Following WWI, those great powers who were victors called for the Paris Peace Conference. Several of the minor powers in attendance complained that the great powers were usurping all of the decision making authority. French Prime Minister Georges Clemenceau, the President of the Conference, reminded them that it was the great powers who had decided there would be a peace conference in the first place and had assembled all of the interested nations.

¹ Martin Wight was a founding member of the English School, a prominent society of academics and professionals searching for a theory of international politics. Wight’s Power Politics remains the standard reference on such matters. However, Adam Watson’s Evolution of International Society and Hedley Bull’s The Anarchical Society are representative of the English School’s lasting contributions. Alexander Wendt and the constructivists, in general, extend the thinking of Wight, Watson and Bull but the essential intellectual work on societies of states and socialization remains with them. For a reference to this quote see: Martin Wight, *Power Politics* (London: Bloomsbury, 2002), 41.

Furthermore, at the end of the war, the great powers had twelve million men under arms which he argued entitled them to greater consideration.² The great powers went on to justify their decision-making procedures by delineating nations with global interests vis-à-vis those with regional or limited interests. Because great powers had wider interests than lesser powers, as well as the resources to sustain those interests, it was generally agreed that it was their duty to settle international affairs. In so doing, the international community hoped that they would mature “from great powers into Great Responsibles.”³

Martin Wight expounded upon the ideas levied at the Paris Peace Conference, defining great powers as those “powers with general interests whose interests are as wide as the state system itself, which today means world-wide.”⁴ Those powers with global general interests earned a permanent seat on the Council of the League of Nations and later on the Security Council of the United Nations. This designation served to bring public recognition to their great power status. However, receiving recognition as a great power is not the sole criteria for being a great power. Thus, Nikita Khrushchev remarked in 1958 that the US policy of not recognizing China under Mao Zedong made no sense. Khrushchev argued that “a great power does not wait for recognition, it reveals itself” as China had done in World War II (WWII) and the Korean War.⁵

As Khrushchev pointed out, there are criteria other than recognition alone which defines a great power. For Hedley Bull, great powers earn that name when three criteria are fulfilled. First, there must be two or more states comparable in status, implying a great power club with rules of membership. Second, great powers must be comparable in military strength. Finally, like Wight, Bull argued great powers must be recognized both domestically and internationally to have special rights and duties.⁶ Because the world accepts that great powers have special rights and duties, “great power” becomes a role that qualified states play within the international society of states.

Bull defined the role of great powers in terms of their special ability and responsibility to maintain international order. He further defined international order as a

² Wight, *Power Politics*, 43.

³ Wight, *Power Politics*, 43.

⁴ Wight, *Power Politics*, 50.

⁵ Wight, *Power Politics*, 45.

⁶ Bull, *The Anarchical Society*, 194-196.

“pattern of activity that sustains the elementary or primary goals of the society of states.”⁷ The primary goals which the society of states seeks are the preservation of the society itself, states’ sovereignty, peace, and “those goals essential for the sustainment of international life such as the limitation of violence, the keeping of promises, and possession of property.”⁸ These elementary goals of international society are shaped by three values basic to all social life which Bull specified as life, truth, and property.⁹ Those basic values underpin the way an international society thinks of itself as being bound together by common values, rules, and a general willingness to cooperate through institutions. Thus, these values form the foundation of international order and provide the common ground through which great powers seek to maintain that order.

Following WWI, the great powers at the Paris Peace Conference used their status to shape international order through common institutions such as the League of Nations. Likewise, the US, Britain, Russia, Nationalist China, and France emerged from WWII as the great powers and sought international order in part through establishing the United Nations (UN).¹⁰ John Ikenberry carefully argues that institutional change through organizations like the UN most often occurs after wars among great powers. He tracks the efficacy and staying power of international institutions from 1815 through the end of the Cold War to show how institutions have been instrumental in refashioning international order.¹¹ International institutions tend to make the great powers more restrained and predictable in the exercise of their power, and in return that power becomes more durable, systematic, and legitimate.¹² Great powers often use institutions to help provide central direction and manage their relations with one another “in such a way as to secure special privileges for themselves” over the long term.¹³ Special privileges tend to sustain power at the top of the international order, thus making power

⁷ Bull, *The Anarchical Society*, 8.

⁸ Bull, *The Anarchical Society*, 16-18. See also James Forsyth, "What Great Powers Make It," *Strategic Studies Quarterly* 7, no. 1 (2013), 15.

⁹ Bull, *The Anarchical Society*, 5.

¹⁰ Wight, *Power Politics*, 41.

¹¹ John Ikenberry, *After Victory: Institutions, Strategic Restraint, and the Rebuilding of Order after Major Wars* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009), 18-20.

¹² Ikenberry, *After Victory*, 269, 273.

¹³ Bull, *The Anarchical Society*, 220.

transitions less likely. In this manner, institutions can effect a stable distribution of power which is sustainable over a relatively long period of time.

Institutions assist the great powers in providing a sense of central direction to international affairs and to manage their relations with one another. They accomplish this by exercising six primary roles: three roles which provide central direction to international affairs, and three which help them manage relations with one another. With respect to central direction, great powers sustain order by “exploiting their local preponderance, by concluding spheres of influence agreements, and by coordinating their policies in relation to other states.”¹⁴ These three roles involve them directly in the defense of the existing distribution of power. Furthermore, when great powers manage their relations with one another by preserving the balance of power, by controlling crises, and by limiting wars they also tend to bolster the existing pattern of power by promoting goals that are widely accepted in international society as whole. These six roles are not merely recommendations or prescriptions for what states should do nor are they representative of what great powers actually do in all cases. They embody the roles the international society expects them to play in upholding international order in most cases, thereby enhancing great power legitimacy.

The first of the six roles great powers typically play in preserving international order is the exercise of local preponderance in specific areas of the world. Bull postulates that when states unilaterally exploit their preponderance they do so through dominance, primacy, or hegemony. A great power dominates when it habitually uses force against lesser neighboring states, continually disregarding their sovereignty, equality, and independence. Domination embraces the idea that lesser states are second-class members of the international society. In contrast, a great power uses primacy when it exercises local preponderance without resort to force or the threat of force. Furthermore, it achieves primacy within the accepted norms for sovereignty, equality, and independence. Therefore, violation of these norms is by exception rather than the rule. The lesser states, in turn, freely concede the position of primacy to the great power. Lastly, a great power exercises local preponderance through hegemony when it occupies a middle position

¹⁴ Bull, *The Anarchical Society*, 220.

between domination and primacy. In this case, a great power may resort to force, but rather than being habitual and uninhibited, it is occasional and reluctant.¹⁵

From the beginning of the Cold War until present, hegemony has been the dominant tendency of the great powers. The former Soviet Union exercised hegemony over Eastern Europe, recognizing each state's sovereignty, equality, and independence insofar as those rights did not threaten the Socialist Commonwealth as a whole. Similarly, the US exercised hegemonic preponderance in the Caribbean and South America, respecting the rights of each state so long as they did not threaten the US policy of containment. Both of these examples show great powers contributing to international order by monopolizing the use of force at the great power level. Lesser states effectively are required to ask permission before violating another state's sovereignty, equality, or independence.

Great powers determine which of these lesser states fall under their purview by exercising the second role: determining spheres of influence. This second role is related to exploiting local preponderance in that it creates consensus among the great powers on where each power's local preponderance is dominant. A sphere of influence agreement need not be formalized as it was when the colonial powers partitioned China into spheres of exclusive economic interest in 1904. Rather, it may amount to nothing more than a shared recognition of which power is more prominent in a particular region. Great powers expect each other to follow the rules of game within their respective spheres of influence. This expectation embraces the idea that international order is not maintained solely through common interests in creating order but also by rules of the game that indicate what kind of behavior is orderly.¹⁶ At times these rules are written out explicitly through organizations such as the UN, and at other times they arise out of settled expectations between great powers that become mutually respected over time. For example, the Soviet Union and the US never signed a formal spheres of influence agreement, yet they implicitly accepted the rule that neither should intervene militarily in conflicts contained within the opposing alliance. Thus, a great power establishes itself in an area and thereby informally establishes that area as part of its sphere of influence. The rules of the game

¹⁵ Bull, *The Anarchical Society*, 207-209.

¹⁶ Bull, *The Anarchical Society*, 52.

then confer certain rights upon that state unless another great power challenges its position in that area.¹⁷

Importantly, not all spheres of influence agreements are negative in the sense that they place a “no trespassing” sign aimed at other great powers who may otherwise intrude into a particular region. Instead, some are positive in the sense that they set up a division of labor among the great powers. After WWII, Churchill favored dividing the world up into three spheres of influence that would represent areas of responsibility for each of the four great powers. Under this construct, the US and Britain would share responsibility for the Atlantic region, Russia would police its region, and China would do the same in its region. Lesser powers would accept the protection of the great powers in each of the three spheres and would in turn relinquish the right to form alliances outside of that sphere. Great powers would be compelled to look out for the interests of the lesser powers if they expected to retain their legitimacy both within that region and internationally.¹⁸

The third role of great powers is to contribute to international order by promoting common policies in the international system. As opposed to the sphere of influence concept of division of labor, this role creates the possibility of joint international governance under a concert of nations reminiscent of the Concert of Europe in the nineteenth century. The Concert of Europe, under the authority of the United Kingdom, Austria, Prussia, Russia, and later, France, utilized joint governance in the period between the Napoleonic Wars and WWI to establish international order. If that were to take place today, the US, China, and perhaps Russia would define common and unique objectives, map out a strategy for attaining them, and then distribute the burdens of such a strategy between the three of them. Though not necessary or sufficient for cooperative governance, mutually agreed upon policies would run more smoothly if they were founded on a common theory or ideology for international order.¹⁹ Mutually agreed upon policies are one means great powers can use to illustrate they are willing to manage their relations with one another.

¹⁷ Bull, *The Anarchical Society*, 216.

¹⁸ Bull, *The Anarchical Society*, 215.

¹⁹ Bull, *The Anarchical Society*, 219.

The fourth role of great powers is to contribute to international order by managing their relations with one another through a preservation of the balance of power. When great powers prove they can manage their relations with one another they gain legitimacy and confidence from the international community. In return, the community places trust in them to provide central direction of the affairs of the international society as a whole.²⁰ Furthermore, preservation of the balance of power “provides the basis of the willingness of other states to accept the notion of the special rights and duties of great powers.”²¹ It also legitimizes the exercise of great power preponderance vis-à-vis the international community. Kenneth Waltz spoke of balance of power politics elegantly when he said “the theory says simply that if some do relatively well, others will emulate them or fall by the wayside.”²² Thus, those states who compete less successfully in an anarchic international system “will fail to prosper, will lay themselves open to dangers, and will suffer.”²³ States, not wanting to suffer, ally themselves with the preponderant great powers, and those alliances create stability and order within the international system. They accept the leadership of the great powers because they must do so in order to prosper. In turn, great powers, as a rule, facilitate peace and prosperity within the international system by limiting crises.

The fifth role of great powers is to contribute to international order by avoiding and controlling crises. The preservation of the balance of power does not at all ensure that great powers will always act peacefully toward one another. The greatest goal of great powers is seldom to entirely avoid crises or even to dampen them in all cases. Rather, as was exemplified by the Cuban Missile Crisis, there are times when great powers purposefully foment a crisis in an attempt to secure a diplomatic victory.²⁴ Nevertheless, great powers most often promote their common interests in avoiding crises or controlling

²⁰ Ikenberry, *After Victory*, 52-53.

²¹ Bull, *The Anarchical Society*, 201.

²² Kenneth Neal Waltz, *Theory of International Politics* (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley Pub. Co., 1979), 118.

²³ Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, 118.

²⁴ Allison and Zelikow present a compelling case that the Soviet Union fomented crisis in Cuba to ultimately secure a favorable decision in Berlin. See Graham T. Allison and Philip Zelikow, *Essence of Decision: Explaining the Cuban Missile Crisis* (New York: Longman, 1999), 99-109.

them when they occur as part of what has been dubbed “management of great power relations.”²⁵ For example, both the US and the Soviet Union sought to restrain Israeli-Arab relations during the Cold War. Today we see a similar example in the way the US and China attempt to quell crises involving Taiwan and thus manage their relationship with one another. Sometimes, crises almost inevitably escalate to war, but great powers hold the key to limiting those wars.²⁶

The sixth role of the great powers is to contribute to international order by limiting war if it does occur. “The efforts made by the great powers to avoid war among themselves are not separable from the role they play in seeking to direct the affairs of international society as whole.”²⁷ This role is similar to the previous role, but has less to do with managing crises and more to do with evolving the rules of the game in a forward thinking manner that keeps wars limited when they occur. Rules agreed upon at the Geneva Convention and disarmament rules agreed upon by the Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START) provide good examples of how great powers manage their relations with one another by placing limitations on war.

The six roles that great powers play in upholding international order center on managing relations with one another and providing central direction within international society. When the ordinary state of affairs is characterized by great powers responsibly and effectively managing their relationships with one another, they bolster their legitimacy to provide central direction within international society.²⁸ They are more likely to secure and preserve the consent of other states to the special role they play within the system. Great powers gain legitimacy in four major ways. First, they act responsibly in accordance with the implicit “rules of the game.” Second, they act orderly, avoiding actions that obviously foment disorder. Third, they act justly, as a general rule, seeking to satisfy some of the demands for just change being expressed in the world. Fourth, they act humbly, incorporating and accommodating middle powers in the

²⁵ Bull, *The Anarchical Society*, 203.

²⁶ Richard Ned Lebow, *Between Peace and War: The Nature of International Crisis* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1981).

²⁷ Bull, *The Anarchical Society*, 206.

²⁸ Ikenberry, *After Victory*, 54, 114, 166.

management of regional issues. In short, great powers generally behave responsibly, orderly, justly, and humbly.²⁹

Through exercising their roles in international affairs and through responsible behavior, great powers create hope resonant of the Paris Peace Conference that the great powers will act as “Great Responsibles.” Historically, ordinary great powers have generally sought to bolster international order. As China continues to rise in power within the international system, it is instructive to analyze potential courses of action that either support or contradict the roles and behaviors of ordinary great powers.

Can China Learn to Behave Like a Great Power: Spoiler, Supporter or Shirker?

Realists generally contend that a structural transformation from unipolarity to multipolarity will result in some of the great powers battling for power and prestige.³⁰ This idea stems from the conviction that multipolar systems inevitably arise because states must balance to survive in a self-help, anarchic system. “The expectation is not that a balance, once achieved, will be maintained, but that a balance, once disrupted, will be restored.”³¹ Unipolarity, by definition, represents a disruption in balance. In this line of reasoning, not only can unipolarity not last, but it is also likely to fuel competitive behavior among states leading to balancing behavior that is inherently conflictual.³² However, that might not be necessarily true. A return to multipolarity is merely indicative a shift in power is or has occurred. No other baggage need be applied to the concept. The rise of other great powers “does not provide insight into whether multipolarity will arrive by means of traditional balancing behavior or as an unintended consequence of inwardly focused states growing at different rates.”³³ Nor does it indicate whether emerging powers will accept or resist the inherited (Western) international order. In other words, states have choices.

²⁹ Bull, *The Anarchical Society*, 222.

³⁰ Schweller and Pu, “After Unipolarity : China's Visions of International Order in an Era of U.S. Decline.” 42. See also John J. Mearsheimer, “China's Unpeaceful Rise,” *Current History* 105, no. 690 (April 2006), 60-62.

³¹ Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, 128.

³² Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, 128, 163.

³³ Schweller and Pu, “After Unipolarity” 42.

The manner in which great powers rise depends largely on what roles emerging powers such as China decide to play. Schweller and Pu lay out a useful framework in which emerging poles in the international system may choose to be (1) spoilers, (2) supporters, or (3) shirkers. Spoilers seek a new international order by means of destroying the existing order. Supporters share in the responsibility of managing the existing order. Shirkers seek the privileges of power in the existing order but eschew the associated responsibilities of contributing to global governance. These three possibilities closely follow three competing Chinese visions that have marched in step with its growth in power over the past thirty years. As China's power has matured, its strategies have gradually shifted toward a negotiated order, and recently, toward the possibility of a new order.³⁴ Within this framework, the spoiler strategy corresponds with a new Chinese international order, the supporter strategy corresponds with a modified liberal order, and the shirker strategy corresponds with a negotiated order.

It is unlikely that China will pursue a spoiler strategy. For one thing, the spoiler aims to eliminate the four dimensions of international order under which the US and China both thrive: hegemony, democracy, capitalism, and Western culture.³⁵ For China to contemplate the spoiler role, US hegemony would have to be waning considerably and Chinese communism thriving internationally. Although China has certainly gained legitimacy through its economic growth rates, its model of communist governance would have to show signs of supplanting democracy on a global scale for a spoiler role to be justified. Even though China's homegrown economic model has been an attractive option for other developing nations, it would have to gain much wider acceptance among the great powers to supersede capitalism. In addition, Chinese traditional philosophy would have to be widely regarded as a better method for dealing with world problems than Western culture currently is.

To undermine the idea of US hegemony, some Chinese scholars argue that the US “empire...fights wars in the name of peace, damages freedom in the name of freedom, and rejects ethics in the name of ethical reasons.”³⁶ To replace the allegedly self-

³⁴ Schweller and Pu, "After Unipolarity," 42.

³⁵ Schweller and Pu, "After Unipolarity," 59.

³⁶ Schweller and Pu, "After Unipolarity," 60.

interested, world-dominance strategy that the US offers, China would form an international order that maximizes the interests of all people. In terms of economics, China may not directly confront the fundamentals of capitalism, but it would almost certainly contain socialist undertones focused on the collectivist ideas of social justice and collective welfare. Some Chinese scholars also criticize democracy, claiming it is too commercialized and does not serve the interests of the masses. To replace democratic liberalism, China would develop a political and legal system based on Chinese traditions. The Chinese point out that their developmental model has already gained considerable traction in developing countries throughout the world. Finally, the Chinese reject the notion that Western culture is superior to the rest of the world. Instead, spoiler strategists argue that a Confucian system based in universal equality between states would be a better system than one which confers greater rights on great powers.³⁷

The spoiler strategy is fraught with problems and represents the strategy China is least likely to pursue. Using Robert Gilpin's theory of hegemonic power transitions, Schweller and Pu argue that China must first challenge the ideational foundations of the existing international order to gain enough power to challenge it. If China is to overthrow the established liberal international order, it must then offer an appealing blueprint for a new international order. The first problem China faces under the spoiler strategy is to challenge the existing liberal order. At present, the international order is unipolar, which is the only system in which balancing behavior is a revisionist, rather than status quo policy.³⁸ Any state which adopts revisionist policies in a unipolar system will be labeled an aggressor. Furthermore, aggressor behavior from another great power is likely to decrease its legitimacy and is antithetical to the responsible behavior laid out by Bull. Namely, the international community expects great powers to contribute to international order by managing their relations with one another and providing central direction to the affairs of international society. As Gilpin points out, relative power changes among the great powers are merely the precursor for international change and are neither necessary

³⁷ Schweller and Pu, "After Unipolarity," 61.

³⁸ Schweller and Pu, "After Unipolarity," 45.

nor sufficient for actual change to occur.³⁹ Even as a rising power gains more prestige, the most accepted and most common types of changes in the international system “are continuous incremental adjustments within the framework of the existing system.”⁴⁰ In light of the current power disparity between the US and China, attempting to change the system from within the current framework represents a more worthwhile strategy for China.

China may also pursue the second vision, aimed at a modified international order through the implementation of a supporter strategy. The modified order essentially mirrors the existing order but grants China some accommodations contingent on its acceptance of increased international responsibility. This strategy lays the groundwork for a bipolar or multipolar system in which a concert of nations shared in the great power responsibilities. Here the great powers would “establish a relatively stable system of cooperation and managed competition.”⁴¹ With respect to the roles of great powers enumerated by Bull, Schweller and Pu believe that China can behave as a responsible great power. If so, China would manage its relations with other great powers by maintaining status quo oriented policies, and by exercising great powers norms of restraint and accommodation. Furthermore, it would help provide central direction to affairs within the international system by upholding the rules and institutions that govern the joint management of the existing global political economy.⁴² As Ikenberry argued, rule of law and centrally organized institutions would place limits on the returns to power, creating a stable system in which returns to power are relatively low and returns to institutions are relatively high.⁴³

In view of China’s unprecedented economic growth under the existing system, it seems reasonable to conclude that they will support this system unless they discern even greater benefits to be gained by an alternative system. Gilpin addressed change in world politics succinctly when he said “states will attempt to change the international system if

³⁹ Robert Gilpin, *War and Change in World Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 93.

⁴⁰ Gilpin, *War and Change in World Politics*, 45.

⁴¹ Schweller and Pu, “After Unipolarity,” 62.

⁴² Schweller and Pu, “After Unipolarity,” 62.

⁴³ Ikenberry, *After Victory*, 258.

the expected benefits exceed the expected costs.”⁴⁴ However, despite China’s critiques for Western ideology it has been unable to elucidate a system that would be more beneficial to them than the existing one. If China is to become more than a simple stakeholder in the existing system, they must be aware of four implications. First, a liberal order assumes Western democracy and human rights are universally valid norms. Second, states hold the present system to be legitimate because all countries can benefit who invest in it and follow its rules. Third, this vision accepts that democracy is desirable and holds great potential as a framework to overcome political problems. Fourth, liberal economic ideas have been essential to China’s success. Importantly, a Chinese supporter strategy also acknowledges the great benefits gained by US provision of public goods not to mention the economic interdependence between the US and China.⁴⁵ If China embraces these ideas, it may well become an indispensable pillar rather than merely a stakeholder in the existing liberal order.

Finally, China may pursue the third vision, aimed at a negotiated international order brought about by a shirker strategy. This strategy represents a middle ground along the order continuum with the right and left margins being a new order on one side and the existing order on the other. In a negotiated order, the international system would not be dominated by great powers. Rather, unipolarity or multipolarity would be replaced by nonpolarity.⁴⁶ This possibility draws on both power transition theory and power diffusion theory which argue that power will disperse over time. The theories diverge in the end, however, with transition theory predicting hegemonic war and diffusion theory predicting peace. A negotiated world order adopts the end state of power diffusion theory positing that rising powers have no mandate to become dissatisfied challengers. In fact, they have no desire to bear the costs of managing the existing order or a new order. They would rather free ride while the declining hegemon pays the costs of order. Eventually, the hegemon, seeking to avoid further decline will retrench from its global commitments “leaving no state or group of states to manage the international system.”⁴⁷

⁴⁴ Gilpin, *War and Change in World Politics*, 10.

⁴⁵ Schweller and Pu, “After Unipolarity,” 63-64.

⁴⁶ Schweller and Pu, “After Unipolarity,” 65.

⁴⁷ Schweller and Pu, “After Unipolarity,” 65.

Gilpin posits that all hegemons decline through predictable patterns and then are replaced by rising ones who become the new hegemon. States race to hegemony, sometimes peacefully, often through hegemonic war.⁴⁸ In contrast, power diffusion theory posits that rising powers will shirk their responsibilities in the existing order rather than become spoilers seeking a new order. Rising powers by definition are surpassing all other states under the existing system and are therefore unlikely to seek its overthrow. Moreover, they are unlikely to choose an enormously costly war with a highly uncertain outcome while they are benefiting greatly under the existing order. Even if China felt the outcome of war was nearly certain, the result of victory would be a new untested order which they would be forced to finance and uphold. Rather than racing to hegemony, this vision supports an inward-focused strategy which maximizes absolute gains and is little concerned with the fate of other states in the larger system.⁴⁹ The idea is similar to Ikenberry's theory in which the returns to power are low and the returns to institutions are high. However, diverging from Ikenberry's conclusions, this vision does not predict that the hegemon will be able to maintain its power indefinitely. Ikenberry's theory is predicated on an institutional bargain in which the leading power agrees to restrain its power "in exchange for greater compliance by subordinate states."⁵⁰ Shirking creates gray areas where compliance is difficult to define, and at times, even more difficult to prove or disprove. Therefore, a shirking strategy allows for the possibility of appearing to comply while covertly eroding the power of the hegemon. Under this scenario, American international order may simply collapse as it becomes too costly to maintain, and institutions would provide de facto governance of the resultant negotiated international order.

The shirker strategy can work in the short term, but eventually other great powers demand that the shirking great power contribute to the order it benefits from. This is especially true in a unipolar world where a single hegemon pays nearly all of the costs of order. The third vision of a negotiated order assumes that "security is plentiful, territory is

⁴⁸ Gilpin, *War and Change in World Politics*, 10, 234.

⁴⁹ Schweller and Pu, "After Unipolarity," 66.

⁵⁰ Ikenberry, *After Victory*, 258.

devalued, and robust liberal consensus exists.”⁵¹ Although there is presently some evidence to support this line of reasoning, it fails to acknowledge that those assumptions largely ring true because the US guarantees them. The US-led order is a system in which the US polices the global commons and is the guarantor of security for much of the world. Ikenberry calls on postwar cases following the Napoleonic Wars, WWI, and WWII to convincingly demonstrate that institutions are upheld and made durable by a leading power.⁵² In a nonpolar world, absent of great powers, it stretches the imagination to picture an order characterized by strong institutions, plentiful security, devalued territory, and robust liberal consensus. Yet shirking “is the strategy that appears most consistent with what China is currently doing.”⁵³

It is not beyond the realm of the possible that China’s long-term strategy is a negotiated international order brought about by shirking. However, it is unlikely that the US will continue to allow China the benefits of the existing order without paying for it. It is illustrative to recall similar behavior from the US in the interwar period. E.H. Carr reminds his readers that the US demanded recognition as a great power at the beginning of the twentieth century. However, in 1918, “when world leadership was offered by almost unanimous consent to the United States” it declined the responsibility and remained inward-focused.⁵⁴ At that time, the US was a free rider under the *Pax Britannica* system, receiving the benefits of international order without paying for them. Only in the aftermath of WWII did the US accept leadership in the international system commensurate with its power. It is not unusual, therefore, that China appears to be pursuing a similar strategy while they are still permitted to do so.

However, China’s apparent shirker strategy is likely to move toward a supporter strategy in which they use rightful resistance to garner greater rights and prestige within the existing system. Rightful resistance, as an accepted norm among the international society of states, “assumes that weak actors (1) partially and temporarily accept the legitimacy of the hegemon, and (2) take advantage of opportunities and authorized

⁵¹ Schweller and Pu, “After Unipolarity,” 66.

⁵² Ikenberry, *After Victory*, 258-266.

⁵³ Schweller and Pu, “After Unipolarity,” 66.

⁵⁴ Edward Hallett Carr and Michael Cox, *The Twenty Years’ Crisis, 1919-1939: An Introduction to the Study of International Relations* (New York: Palgrave, 2001), 215.

channels within the order to make relative gains and to contest particular behaviors of the hegemon.”⁵⁵ A rising power like China may employ a strategy of rightful resistance to improve its position within the established order. In this scenario, China agrees the rules of the game are valid but feels disenfranchised by the application of those rules.

Interestingly, rightful resistance often “deepens the legitimacy of the existing order because the strategy dictates that emerging powers follow established rules, norms, and practices of international politics and act through authorized channels.”⁵⁶ Here, China may become socialized to the existing system inadvertently.

Regardless of whether rightful resistance produces inadvertent socialization to the system, it generally strengthens an emerging nation’s position in the existing order. Managers of the existing system must beware that the bid for increased rights, prestige, and therefore, power may have opposite goals. On the one hand, China’s goal may be to use its increasing power to gain additional benefits within the established order. On the other hand, it may use its increasing power “for the purpose of waging a hegemonic bid to overturn [the existing] order when doing so becomes a viable option.”⁵⁷ To seek overthrow of the current order, China would have to believe two things. First, it would have to feel strongly that the current order is illegitimate and intolerable. Second, it also would have to be convinced that it could both usher in a more legitimate order and uphold it economically, militarily, and diplomatically. However, these revisionist aims are inconsistent with the dominant international relations school of thought in China.

Conclusions

Chinese strategist Wang Jisi, Dean of Peking University’s School of International Studies, believes “it would be foolhardy for Beijing to challenge directly the international order and the institutions favored by the Western world—and, indeed, such a challenge is unlikely.”⁵⁸ China appears to be executing at least part of a shirker strategy at present, but it is reasonable to conclude that this strategy will be untenable in the near future because of the costs imposed on the US. Additionally, the shirker strategy does not of necessity need to be linked to the goal of a negotiated international order. Like the US in the

⁵⁵ Schweller and Pu, “After Unipolarity,” 50.

⁵⁶ Schweller and Pu, “After Unipolarity,” 51.

⁵⁷ Schweller and Pu, “After Unipolarity,” 51.

⁵⁸ Schweller and Pu, “After Unipolarity,” 53.

interwar period, China seems likely to seek the benefits of free riding on *Pax Americana* until that no longer remains a viable option. However, as China continues to be socialized to the existing system, the international society can reasonably expect it to adopt a supporter strategy consistent with ordinary great power behavior. In this scenario, the US would either willingly share the privileges and responsibilities of world leadership with China or, alternatively, China would employ rightful resistance to gain greater rights and prestige within the system. Through this analysis, one can reasonably conclude that China desires recognition as a great power but is still hesitant to accept its responsibilities.

Bull stated that great powers are internationally recognized to have special rights, but also special duties within the international order.⁵⁹ Ikenberry argues that it is the legitimacy of great powers that underwrites the exercise of these special rights. Furthermore that legitimacy only comes by way of operating within the rules of the game largely dictated by the great powers and projected through the medium of institutions.⁶⁰ Gilpin writes that states succeed as great powers partially because they dictate the rules of the game and “partially because other states benefit from and accept their leadership.”⁶¹ The international society of states expects China to lead as a great power in a legitimate fashion, within the rules of the game. China shows a willingness to pursue power gains within the existing order and has increasingly moved toward, not away from Western ideology. For example, “Chinese leaders and scholars have increasingly come to use the term ‘democracy’ to describe the goal of China’s political development.”⁶² Regardless of what the Chinese may envision their version of democracy to look like, it suggests that socialization is having a normative impact on China. Abiding by international norms is a notable step for China toward responsible, orderly, humble great power behavior.

China is not only capable of adopting the roles and behaviors indicative of great powers, but is also likely to do so based on the benefits associated with legitimate great power status. The next chapter will move beyond present-day Chinese strategy and likely course of action to analyze China’s great power history. I will examine Chinese history

⁵⁹ Bull, *The Anarchical Society*, 196.

⁶⁰ Ikenberry, *After Victory*, 52, 57, 265.

⁶¹ Gilpin, *War and Change in World Politics*, 144.

⁶² Schweller and Pu, “After Unipolarity,” 67.

from 1949 onward as a tool to assess its trends toward or away from adopting great power roles and behaviors.

CHAPTER 2

The Young Spoiler State

The world was shocked by China's entry into the Korean War, perhaps America most of all. The expectation was that they would not extend the revolutionary act of Kim Il Sung. Furthermore, the West expected it to act responsibly through internationally recognized diplomatic channels if they felt compelled to intervene. Even the Soviet Union under Stalin, not known to be a paragon of responsibility, made major diplomatic moves before intervening. For example, Moscow denounced UN resolutions in Korea as "illegal" because Soviet delegates were absent as were the "legal representatives of the Chinese people." Next, Moscow petitioned the UN to allow both a Soviet and PRC delegate to be represented on the Security Council before making further decisions on Korea. Finally, Moscow proposed that Soviet Delegate Jacob Malik be Security Council President for the upcoming August sessions.¹ Because the Soviets acted within diplomatic norms, "policymakers in Washington found that at least there existed between themselves and the Soviet leaders 'certain interests in common' in avoiding a direct military confrontation between them."² In stark contrast, statesmen in America viewed Beijing's behavior as "fundamentalist, violent, and revolutionary."³ Washington would therefore come to distinguish between the Soviet Union as the "reasonable adversary" and China as the "irrational foe."⁴ Although not irrational by any means, Mao Zedong was fixated on a new international order ushered in by Communist revolution throughout the world and therefore the existing standards for responsible great power behavior held little sway over his decisions.⁵

The Korean War as a Spoiler Strategy

¹ Allen Suess Whiting, *China Crosses the Yalu: The Decision to Enter the Korean War* (New York: Macmillan, 1960), 69-70.

² Chen, *China's Road to the Korean War: The Making of the Sino-American Confrontation*, 290. See also Rosemary Foot, *The Wrong War: American Policy and the Dimensions of the Korean Conflict, 1950-1953* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1985), 27-28.

³ Foot, *The Wrong War*, 27.

⁴ Foot, *The Wrong War*, 28.

⁵ Chen, *China's Road to the Korean War: The Making of the Sino-American Confrontation*, 215.

Mao's decision to enter the Korean War is indicative of his desires to achieve great power status, but he seems to have eschewed the corresponding responsibilities. Responsible behavior is normative. For example, the US needs China to operate by accepted international norms and standards of behavior today. As mentioned, those norms shape the contours of the many roles played by the great powers. Each role contributes to the great powers' ability to manage relations amongst themselves and provide central direction to international affairs. This section examines Chinese history in an attempt to determine if China is trending toward or away from responsible great power behavior.

Before returning to the Korean War, it is illuminating to briefly survey how China got there. The US played a significant role in China's rise to great power status. In 1898, Secretary of State John Hay and President William McKinley pursued an Open Door Policy to allow multiple imperial powers access to China with no one nation controlling it. France and Russia sought to partition China, but Hay sent diplomatic cables to all of the great powers seeking formal agreement that there would be no interference in the administrative or territorial integrity of China. Hay also sought each country's commitment to promote free trade at the Chinese treat ports that lay within their respective spheres of influence.⁶ A subsequent Open Door circular in 1900 specified "the policy of the Government of the United States is to seek...to preserve Chinese territorial and administrative entity" thereby appearing to commit the US to Chinese protection from foreign infringements on its borders.⁷ According to George Kennan, this policy committed the US to be the guarantor of Chinese territorial integrity "created a precedent which was destined to bedevil American diplomatic practice for at least a half century."⁸ However, to the American people, it was a triumph of American principles in the international realm; "an American blow for an American idea."⁹

⁶ Y. Sugita, *The Rise of an American Principle in China: A Reinterpretation of the First Open Door Notes toward China* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Publishing, 2003), 13.

⁷ George F. Kennan and John J. Mearsheimer, *American Diplomacy: Sixtieth-Anniversary Expanded Edition* (University of Chicago Press, 2012), 36.

⁸ Kennan, *American Diplomacy: Sixtieth-Anniversary Expanded Edition*, 35.

⁹ Kennan, *American Diplomacy: Sixtieth-Anniversary Expanded Edition*, 40.

Not surprisingly, these principles, and therefore America's commitment to China, soon proved to have no teeth as Russia and Japan vied for control of parts of Manchuria. President Theodore Roosevelt was pleased to see a balance of power developing between Russia and Japan and so chose not to intervene.¹⁰ Though the United States had been helpful to China, the Chinese people perceived that the US was committed to their territorial integrity in word only. It would be just over forty years before the US committed itself to China in deed also through resupply operations over the Himalayas during WWII. With the Allied defeat of Japan in 1945, China was able to celebrate victory over the Japanese who had been at war with them on their own soil since 1937. China emerged as a great power after WWII in large part because the West named it one of five nations that would be responsible for rebuilding the postwar world order. Despite disagreement from Stalin, the West formalized China's status by inviting it to join the US, Britain, France, and Russia as one of the five permanent members of the newly formed United Nations Security Council.¹¹

Although the US showed clear commitment to China in WWII, it fundamentally misunderstood the millennia-old geopolitical context between China, Japan, and Korea. The US's WWII policy requiring unconditional surrender from Japan put the US squarely in the middle of a centuries-old rivalry between China and Japan. After Japan's surrender, the US helped Japan draft a new constitution that disallowed possession of an offensive military force. In so doing, the US inherited nearly all of Japan's security commitments, and as the successor power in Japan, also inherited the tradition of conflict with China.¹²

The staging point for the majority of conflicts between China and Japan had historically been Korea. America's misunderstanding of this geopolitical fact proved to be the impetus for serious blunder. As Louis Halle makes clear, "the Korean peninsula has been for centuries, and was bound to be, a strategic point of utmost sensitivity" between China and Japan.¹³ The peninsula was the route by which either country might invade the other. Because Korea's geography was so pivotal, both China and Japan saw

¹⁰ Kennan, *American Diplomacy: Sixtieth-Anniversary Expanded Edition*, 47.

¹¹ Bull, *The Anarchical Society*, 196, 216.

¹² Louis J. Halle, *The Cold War as History* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1967), 192.

¹³ Halle, *The Cold War as History*, 192.

military control of Korea as a means of their respective security. In fact, they had fought for control of the peninsula many times reaching as far back as the 660s.¹⁴ Because Korea was pivotal in terms of security between Japan and China, and because the US inherited Japan's security commitments, China viewed US involvement in Korea in 1950 as a threat to their security. Although the US was able to assuage some of the insecurity Chiang Kai-shek felt, the same would not hold true for Mao Zedong after he emerged the victor of the Chinese civil war.

When Mao seized power in 1949, America's commitment to his nationalist rival, Chiang Kai-shek, furthered China's feeling of insecurity. For fifty years the US had treated China with parental favor. Chiang Kai-shek, a convert to Christianity, emerged as the dominant leader in China. His wife, Mme, charmed American diplomats and the public alike with eloquent and moving speeches asking for help to save her people.¹⁵ Both American politicians and the American public were quick to give Kai-shek and Mme their backing as they sought to win a two-front war against Chinese communism and the Japanese. The Chinese nationalists, led by Chiang, and the Chinese Communists, led by Mao, had been at war since 1927. Chiang had enjoyed the upper hand against Mao for several years as WWII drew to a close and it seemed clear that he would continue to run China after WWII. Neither Harry Truman nor Josef Stalin had anticipated the possibility that Chiang and the nationalists would be fleeing to the Formosa four years after the Japanese surrender.¹⁶ Yet that is exactly what happened and in 1949 the Communists took over the most populous nation in the world.

Soon after taking control, Mao developed closer ties with Stalin. Despite coming to power with little help from Moscow, Mao's Marxist-Leninist ideology closely aligned him with Stalin and his international communist movement. In June of 1949, Mao announced that the new China "must ally with the Soviet Union, and with the proletariat and broad masses of the people in all other countries, and form an international united front...We must lean to one side."¹⁷ Not only did Mao's ideology provide him motivation to side with Stalin, but so too did his desire to link his own revolution to what he

¹⁴ Halle, *The Cold War as History*, 193.

¹⁵ Halle, *The Cold War as History*, 194.

¹⁶ Gaddis, *The Cold War*, 37.

¹⁷ Halle, *The Cold War as History*, 37.

considered the most successful one in all of history – the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917. Moreover, Mao felt betrayed by the Americans who engaged him favorably during WWII, but now seemed to be leaning to the side of Chiang. Mao's fear and insecurity over the future of Formosa grew more aggravated and eventually led him to conclude that



The Korean War (Reprinted from Gaddis, John Lewis. *The Cold War: A New History*. New York: Penguin Press, 2005).

Source: Gaddis, *The Cold War*, 44.

President Truman was preparing an invasion of mainland China to put Chiang and the Nationalists back in power.¹⁸ Mao and the PRC increasingly leaned to the side of Moscow, finally making an official alliance in February of 1950 with the signing of the Sino-Soviet Treaty of Friendship and Alliance.

As communist alliances were gaining strength in the Far East, America's intentions became increasingly murky. In mid-1949, American troops withdrew from their occupation of South Korea. Six months later, on January 12, 1950, Secretary of State Acheson made the announcement that the American "defensive perimeter" did not include South Korea. Following the announcement, North Korea's Kim Il Sung stepped up his pleas to Stalin, requesting an invasion of South

¹⁸ Halle, *The Cold War as History*, 38.

Korea to reunite the peninsula.¹⁹ Although Stalin was initially resistant to Kim's plans, US retrenchment from the area encouraged him to assist his brother-in-arms. Four months later, North Korea, in collusion with the Soviet Union and China, invaded South Korea and drew China ever closer to conflict with the US. President Truman's reaction to the North Korean attack involved "neutralization" of the Formosa Strait by the US Seventh Fleet to discourage Mao from invading Chiang's last redoubt.²⁰ Chinese Foreign Minister Zhou Enlai charged Truman with "armed aggression against the territory of China and a total violation of the United Nations Charter."²¹ The Korean War was now in full tilt, and it seemed clear that the US and China had antithetical aims in the Korea and Formosa.

Readers familiar with the Korean War will recall that it resembled a tug of war that roughly corresponded to five phases. Phase I began on June 25, 1950 when the North Korean People's Army (NKPA) pushed south of the 38th parallel attacking the vastly outnumbered South Korean forces. As the South Koreans were being quickly overran, American troops deployed from Japan where they had been stationed as part of the Japanese occupation following WWII. However, the American support was too little too late, and soon both American and South Korean forces were bottled up behind the Nakdong River in a perimeter defending Pusan.²²

Phase II began when General Douglas MacArthur landed his force at Inchon to the NKPA's rear on September 15, 1950. Overextended supply lines and significant combat attrition left the NKPA highly vulnerable to counterattack. MacArthur cut off the NKPA from the north and inflicted significant damage on it as his forces moved south toward Pusan. Because of his well-executed intervention, the US Eighth Army and South Korean forces were able to break out of the Pusan perimeter. The NKPA collapsed quickly, forcing statesmen on both sides to make short-notice decisions that would have a strategic impact on the war.

¹⁹ Paul Wingrove, "Who Started Korea?," *History Today* 50 (2000), 44.

²⁰ Whiting, *China Crosses the Yalu: The Decision to Enter the Korean War*, 49.

²¹ Hiroyuki Umetsu, "Communist China's Entry into the Korean Hostilities and a U.S. Proposal for a Collective Security Arrangement in the Pacific Offshore Island Chain," *Journal of Northeast Asian Studies* (1982), 99.

²² Michael J. Neufeld, *Von Braun: Dreamer of Space, Engineer of War* (New York: A.A. Knopf, 2007), 249.

Phase III started when the inaccurately named Chinese People's Volunteer Army (PVA) sent massive waves of bugle-blowing soldiers screaming southward in November of 1950. In part, China's reasons for entry into the war were many, but MacArthur's "end the war offensive" north of the 38th parallel played a part in Beijing's decision calculus.²³ As MacArthur pushed his forces north toward the Yalu River, they repeated the mistake the North Koreans had formerly made when they overextended their supply lines to the Pusan perimeter. Although MacArthur had an intelligence report which estimated the staging of 868,000 troops north of the Yalu, American forces were caught off guard when 300,000 members of the PVA swarmed southward.²⁴ A mass of PVA soldiers chased the retreating American Eighth Army and Tenth Corps south of the parallel once again, fortunate to have not suffered greater casualties.

Phase IV began in the early months of 1951 as the Eighth Army began taking back lost ground under the superb leadership of Matthew Ridgway. MacArthur watched from the sidelines after being relieved of command because President Truman "could no longer tolerate his insubordination."²⁵ Truman cited MacArthur's unilateral communiqué to the Chinese offering them a ceasefire as the straw that broke the camel's back.²⁶ The Chinese rejected the offer, however, after reaching their culminating point by sacking Seoul, South Korea's capital. After Ridgway took command, his counteroffensive pushed the Chinese and North Korean forces out of Seoul and north of the parallel.

Phase V began after the 38th parallel once again demarcated the forward line of troops for both sides. At that time, armistice talks began and would continue for two more years. A two-year stalemate had begun in the mountainous Korean terrain that

²³ Umetsu, "Communist China's Entry into the Korean Hostilities and a U.S. Proposal for a Collective Security Arrangement in the Pacific Offshore Island Chain," 100.

²⁴ Conrad C. Crane, *American Airpower Strategy in Korea, 1950-1953* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2000), 46. See also Gaddis, *The Cold War*, 45.

²⁵ Dorris C. James, *The Years of MacArthur 2, 1941-1945*, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1976), 588.

²⁶ James, *The Years of MacArthur 2, 1941-1945*, 586.

would not end until 36,568 Americans, some 600,000 Chinese, and over 2 million Korean military and civilians would lay dead on the peninsula.²⁷

From the Past, the Future?

China's decision to enter the Korean War provides a baseline for assessing the likelihood of it acting as a responsible great power today. Before analyzing this momentous occasion in recent Chinese history, however, it is central to understand the supporter-spoiler-shirker framework as it relates to responsible great power behavior. In any discussion of responsible great power behavior, it is important to note that responsible great powers do not always act responsibly. Therefore, any assessment of whether a great power is likely to act responsibly in the future admittedly contains elements of subjectivity, but simultaneously contains empirical data based on historical trends. Responsible great power behavior first and foremost bolsters the existing order.²⁸ Therefore, revisionist behavior aimed at a new international order is considered irresponsible and likely to result in hegemonic war or even world war.²⁹ Responsible behavior that bolsters the existing order is characterized by compliance with international norms or the "rules of the game." The preeminent right of great powers is to determine the rules of the game, to be the agenda setters. However, with this internationally acknowledged right, comes considerable responsibility. Schweller and Pu analyze responsible behavior by dividing great powers into categories: supporters, shirkers, and spoilers. Only those states that act as "supporters" qualify as responsible great powers. Supporters seek a peaceful path to changes within the international system because they believe the existing system is legitimate. Moreover, they preserve the existing system by exercising traditional great power roles, essentially providing international order as a public good.³⁰ Using this framework, one can better determine whether China's decision

²⁷ Gaddis, *The Cold War*, 50. See also Crane, *American Airpower Strategy in Korea, 1950-1953*, 1-3. The five phases of Korea are an adaptation from Crane's summary of the Korean War.

²⁸ Bull, *The Anarchical Society: A Study of Order in World Politics*, 209. See also Ikenberry, *After Victor*, 269, 273.

²⁹ Gilpin, *War and Change in World Politics*.

³⁰ Schweller and Pu, "After Unipolarity: China's Visions of International Order in an Era of U.S. Decline," 63. See also Amrita Narlikar, "Is India a Responsible Great Power?,"

to enter the Korean War is more consistent with responsible supporter behavior or irresponsible spoiler behavior.

When China entered the Korean War by sending troops south of the Yalu River on October 19, 1950, the Chinese Communist regime made the decision despite enormous domestic problems. In its first year of existence, the PRC was still trying to achieve political consolidation, rebuild a war-shattered economy, and finish reunifying the country.³¹ Why did Mao decide to enter a war against a group of much stronger Western allies? The answer to that question has evolved as more and more sources from China and the Soviet Union have become accessible. In the 1950s, there was a pervasive thought that China's entry into the war was part of a "well-coordinated Communist plot of worldwide expansion."³² As Secretary of State Dean Acheson put it, "This Chinese government is really a tool of Russian Imperialism."³³ Acheson's comment reflected a widespread belief that Beijing's entrance into the Korean War was subordinate to Moscow's Cold War strategy. Early scholarship on the Korean War tended to highlight China's policy as aggressive, violent, and irrational.³⁴

In the 1960s, Allan Whiting's benchmark study, *China Crosses the Yalu*, strongly influenced new thinking on China and the Korean War.³⁵ He argued that Beijing's decision to enter the war was based primarily on the PRC's perception of threat to China's national security brought about by American military successes on the peninsula. Whiting argued that China was a victim of its own perception of American aggression, imperialism, and disregard for Chinese diplomacy. He pointed to three instances where China tried to deter the UN forces from crossing the 38th parallel by issuing both private and public warnings of China's intent to enter the war should it be crossed. The first was a secret cable on October 2 to the Indian ambassador by Foreign Minister Zhou Enlai, the second was a ministry of foreign affairs public statement on October 10, and the third was the PRC's formal acknowledgment of the presence of the PVA in Korea on

Third World Quarterly 32, no. 9 (2011), 1609. Narlikar argues that provision of public goods is one of the hallmarks of great powers.

³¹ Chen, *China's Road to the Korean War*, 1.

³² Chen, *China's Road to the Korean War*, 2.

³³ Gaddis, *The Cold War*, 38.

³⁴ Chen, *China's Road to the Korean War*, 2.

³⁵ Whiting, *China Crosses the Yalu*, iii-ix, 158-159.

November 11 prior to MacArthur's offensive to the Yalu River.³⁶ This period of scholarship lacked access to Chinese archival materials and was thus used only contextual analysis to surmise that the Korean War was not a war China wanted, but felt compelled to enter because of existential threats to their national security.³⁷ This narrative portraying China's reluctant involvement based on imminent threats to their physical security dominated scholarship until the 1990s. The result was that many scholars speculated China would not have intervened if the US had not crossed the 38th parallel.

In the 1990s, following the collapse of the Cold War, China and the Soviet Union allowed access to massive amounts of new material. Telegrams from Mao, classified documents, Chinese Communist Party (CCP) deliberations, sensitive archival documents, and the memoirs of statesmen and Generals became available.³⁸ Chen Jian's landmark study, *China's Road to the Korean War*, became the new standard for understanding China's entry into the war and remains widely influential today. He found that the physical security of the Chinese-Korean border was only one piece of a much larger decision calculus within the Politburo. Mao and his associates aimed not to merely defend their homeland but "to win a glorious victory by driving the Americans off the Korean peninsula."³⁹

The evolution of scholarship on China's involvement in the Korean War created two camps with differing conclusions. Traditional scholarship tends to view China in 1950 as a supporter of the international system which only entered the war out of fear from American aggression. In contrast, contemporary scholarship tends to view the 1950s era China as a spoiler of the international system which entered the war willingly with the intent to support worldwide revolution. China saw war as a way "to revitalize its great power status through the promotion of revolutions following the Chinese model in East

³⁶ Allen Whiting, "China's Use of Force, 1950-96, and Taiwan," *Peace Research Abstracts* 41, no. 5 (2004), 106.

³⁷ For examples see the writings of Allen Whiting, J.H. Kaliki, Melvin Gurtov, Byong-Moo Hwang, and Geral Segal.

³⁸ Shu Guang Zhang, *Mao's Military Romanticism: China and the Korean War, 1950-1953* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 1995), 4. See also Chen, *China's Road to the Korean War*, 5.

³⁹ Chen, *China's Road to the Korean War*, 3. Gaddis, *The Cold War: A New History*, 45.

Asia and in the world.”⁴⁰ In light of the most recent evidence, with added emphasis on the war deliberations of Mao and the CCP, the most persuasive argument seems to portray China as a spoiler when they entered the Korean War.

China’s decision to follow a spoiler strategy centered on two competing ideas for international order: containment and revolution. America sought containment of Communism and China sought Asian-wide or worldwide revolution.⁴¹ Recall that the world was bipolar in 1950 and was dominated by two great powers, the US and the Soviet Union. The world was split between capitalism and communism and between democracy and socialism. It was a world in which Soviet gains would equal American losses and vice versa. However, in spite of this split, a fragile equilibrium had been established in the world. Korea represented a microcosm of that fragility. China supported the North Koreans who upset the status quo stability through what Acheson termed “naked aggression.”⁴² However, merely siding against the US or against Western ideology is not the evidentiary basis for portraying China as a spoiler. Rather, a significant body of evidence suggests that China sought the overthrow of the international system through revolution, did not see the system as legitimate, and was unwilling to preserve the existing system by exercising traditional great power roles. China’s decision to act as a spoiler was less a reaction to physical insecurity as it was to tension between containment and revolution.

The tension between containment and revolution for Washington and Beijing was intense and indicative of the misunderstandings, misperceptions, and mistakes that dominated relations between them. The two sides interacted with little understanding of the other’s rationales. Three fundamental rationales underpinned China’s foreign policy and security strategy: 1) revolutionary nationalism, 2) a sense of duty to perpetuate revolution throughout Asia and the world, and 3) determination to fuel the Chinese revolution at home.⁴³ These three rationales provided the current that carried Beijing’s management of the Korean crisis along. First, Mao and the CCP believed that war in Korea would bolster their domestic authority and unite the Chinese people. They believed

⁴⁰ Chen, *China’s Road to the Korean War*, 218.

⁴¹ Chen, *China’s Road to the Korean War*, 213.

⁴² D.S. Margolies, *A Companion to Harry S. Truman* (New York: Wiley, 2012), 60.

⁴³ Chen, *China’s Road to the Korean War*, 214-215.

that Communist revolution in China would revitalize the Chinese nation. It would destroy the old world and restore China's position as a "Central Kingdom" in the emergent new world. Mao longed for China to have a prominent position in world politics. Second, Mao and his comrades were confident their example had established a paragon of revolution for all oppressed peoples throughout Asia and the world. Mao argued that Chinese Communists had a duty to support Communist revolutions wherever feasible. Korea was an important first step in that direction. Through worldwide revolution, "Communist China would no longer be bound by any existing norms and codes of behavior in international relations."⁴⁴ Mao further believed the second and first rationale were interrelated insofar as China's return as a central power would be brought about by worldwide revolutions modeled after the one in China. Third, Communist leaders in China worried their own organic revolution might lose momentum after the civil war victory, the "first step in its long march." Mao's obsession with maintaining the internal dynamics of his homegrown revolution led him to continuously emphasize the existence of outside threats to the revolution. The "capitalist" and "imperialist" America became the logical target of his revolutionary rhetoric. While Mao did not initially consider the US to be an immediate threat to the physical security of China, he nevertheless identified it as the foremost enemy to the Chinese revolution.⁴⁵ His misperception of American intentions was equally reciprocated in the West.

With a split between containment and revolution as the backdrop, US rationale in foreign policy toward China is perhaps best described as being centered on an overall philosophy of American exceptionalism. This inclination made it unlikely for America to be in a position to understand the rationales that galvanized the CCP prior to its decision

⁴⁴ This view is most explicitly expressed in a 1949 public speech by Liu Shaoqui, one of Mao's top advisors and fellow revolutionaries, who later became Chairman of the PRC in 1959. The quote here can be seen in: Chen, *China's Road to the Korean War*, 214. Additional sources that make the same general argument are: Lu Dingyi, *The Worldwide Significance of the Chinese Revolution* (Beijing: People's Press, 1992), 432-439; Gaddis, *The Cold War*, 42-45; Samuel S. Kim, *China, the United Nations, and World Order* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1979), 19-23; and Chao Guo and Rongrong Ren, "Symposium: Policy-Making In China, Part 2: China's Decision To Enter The Korean War Revisited," *Public Administration Quarterly*. 27, no. 3 (2003), 292.

⁴⁵ Chen, *China's Road to the Korean War : The Making of the Sino-American Confrontation*, 214-215.

to enter the Korean War. For centuries, America had believed in its special destiny in the world, making it easier for American policy makers to assume that American values held universal significance. This assumption took on even greater importance with China because America considered itself to have a special relationship with China based on the Open Door Policy it had championed previously.⁴⁶ While Mao aggressively pursued his “new China,” America sought the diplomatic heritage of the old China.

In seeking the old China, Washington developed a non-recognition strategy toward the PRC, opting instead to recognize the defeated Chiang and his Kuomintang Nationalists exiled on Formosa. Confident of America’s values, strength, and influence, they saw recognition as a possible weapon to put leverage on the CCP.⁴⁷ Acheson cabled the CCP, identifying perquisites for recognition which stressed it would be contingent upon the CCP’s “ability and willingness to discharge its international obligation.”⁴⁸ This cable was in response to the CCP’s detainment of American and other Western diplomats following the Communist victory in the Chinese Civil War. The implication from Acheson was that the US would not recognize the PRC until Chinese diplomacy and foreign policy fell in line with the diplomatic heritage of the old China, an unapologetically American standard. It was precisely this type of misperception and misunderstanding between the two states that further entrenched them in dogmatism concerning which view of international order was right. Consequently, when they first faced each other in the international arena, they had no commonality in language or codes of behavior to ease the tension.⁴⁹

The diverging thoughts about international order and the escalating confrontation between Beijing and Washington provide the context for the PRC’s management of the ensuing Korea crisis. By June 1950, each country had come to perceive the other as a dangerous rival with irreconcilable aims. Mao and the CCP sought to consolidate its rule

⁴⁶ David McLean, "American Nationalism, the China Myth, and the Truman Doctrine: The Question of Accommodation with Peking, 1949-50," *Diplomatic History* 10, no. 1 (1986), 25-42.

⁴⁷ Chen, *China's Road to the Korean War: The Making of the Sino-American Confrontation*, 45.

⁴⁸ Chen, *China's Road to the Korean War: The Making of the Sino-American Confrontation*, 45.

⁴⁹ Foot, *The Wrong War*, 27.

in China, transform Chinese society by maintaining the momentum of the revolution, and revitalize China's great power status through the promotion of Chinese-style revolutions throughout the world. These revolutionary motives to enter the war superseded the threat to physical security that China undoubtedly perceived. In addition, they also superseded the Soviet pressures to enter the war.

To be sure, physical security was an important element in the CCP's deliberation to go to war, but it was not the determining factor. If physical insecurity was in fact decisive in Beijing's calculus, one could argue that they acted out of self-defense rather than as a spoiler of international order. However, that argument does not align with the evidence. Just three weeks after the North Korean invasion of the South, Mao had already initiated the "Great Movement to Resist America and Assist Korea," while American and South Korean forces were still bottled up behind the Pusan Perimeter.⁵⁰ A full two months before Phase II started with the September 15 landing at Incheon, Mao had already mobilized his country for war and ramped up inflammatory rhetoric against US "imperialism."⁵¹ Although Mao recognized the military might of the US, he convinced himself and his people that a weak army could claim victory over a strong enemy because 'man' could beat 'weapon.'⁵² Mao's military romanticism led him to analyze possible outcomes based on qualitative concepts such as strength of will rather than quantitative variables such as the number of tanks. Mao firmly believed in human superiority over technological superiority so it took little imagination for him to assume Chinese victory in the face of capitalist mercenaries.⁵³ Therefore, on August 4 he spoke to the Politburo revealing his inclination to intervene and establishing deadlines for completion of China's military mobilization in anticipation of operations in Korea. On September 5, he clarified his ideas about confronting America and stated reasons why China need not fear US nuclear weapons.⁵⁴ Given the foregoing evidence indicating Mao's predilection for

⁵⁰ Whiting, "China's Use of Force, 1950-96, and Taiwan," 106.

⁵¹ Chen, *China's Road to the Korean War*, 218.

⁵² Mao Zedong, "On Protracted War," in *Selected Military Writings of Mao Tse-Tung* (Peking: Foreign Languages Press, 1968), 217, 238. See Also Mao Zedong and Stuart R. Schram, *The Political Thought of Mao Tse-tung* (New York: Praeger, 1969), 55.

⁵³ Zhang, *Mao's Military Romanticism*, 11.

⁵⁴ Michael H. Hunt, "Beijing and the Korean Crisis, June 1950-June 1951," *Political Science Quarterly* 107, no. 3 (1992), 469. Mao was convinced that the US would not use

intervention at a time when it still seemed reasonable to conclude that North Korea would win the war on its own, the evidence suggests that physical security of the Sino-Korean border took a back seat in the war decision calculus.

One could argue that America's mere presence on the Korean peninsula threatened Mao, but there are no indications he worried about US presence on the peninsula when they were stationed there a year earlier. All of his discussions concerning physical security revolved around the 38th parallel which would not be breached by UN forces until October 9, after the Chinese decision to enter the war had been all but made. On October 2, Mao met with the Politburo and argued that China should enter the war and immediately send troops to Korea. Then, at the October 4 Politburo meeting, "he applied both his authority and political wisdom to secure the war decision's confirmation and implementation."⁵⁵ Therefore, it becomes increasingly clear that Mao was not dominated by thoughts about physical security at the time he committed to involvement in Korea. Rather than feeling threatened, Mao anticipated a glorious victory that would elevate China in the eyes of the world.⁵⁶ The only thing that slowed the process of entering the war was the fact that the Soviets suddenly reneged on their promise of air support on October 10. Even without Soviet air support, it took Mao and Foreign Minister Zhou only three more days to convince the CCP to enter the war.⁵⁷

Leaning away from the physical security argument, some scholars have suggested that Soviet pressure was the primary reason China got involved. From this, one could argue that China was merely acting as a supporter of the existing balance of power rather than as a spoiler of international order. The reasoning goes that China was allied with the Soviets and therefore took up the Communist mantle because the situation dictated that the Soviets remain at arm's length. However, this argument runs contrary to a significant body of evidence. Far from being a reluctant victim, it has already been shown that Mao and his comrades saw much to be gained by entry into this war. Furthermore, Stalin

nuclear weapons. Even if they did, he reasoned that nuclear weapons would have little impact on his agrarian society.

⁵⁵ Chen, *China's Road to the Korean War* 219.

⁵⁶ Chen, *China's Road to the Korean War* 212.

⁵⁷ Andrew Scobell, "Soldiers, Statesmen, Strategic Culture and China's 1950 Intervention in Korea," *Journal of Contemporary China* 8, no. 22 (1999), 483-484.

initially showed little enthusiasm for the war, making the argument that he was the puppeteer in a master Cold War strategy less convincing.

In 1949, Kim Il Sung repeatedly approached Stalin asking for Soviet permission and support to invade South Korea and reunify the peninsula. Stalin's response was: "You should not advance to the South. First of all, the Korean People's Army does not have an overwhelming superiority over the troops of the South. Numerically, as I understand, you are even behind them. Second, there are still American troops in the South which will interfere in the case of hostilities. Third, one should not forget that the agreement on the 38th Parallel is in effect between the USSR and the United States. If the agreement is broken by our side, it is more of a reason to believe that the Americans will interfere."⁵⁸ When the US troops left South Korea in mid-1949, and Acheson made the infamous public announcement that the American "defensive perimeter" did not extend to South Korea, Stalin began to give more consideration to Kim's repeated requests.⁵⁹ Eventually, Moscow gave into Pyongyang's requests and even encouraged Kim by helping him plan the invasion. Even with what seemed like ambivalence from America toward Korea, Stalin required Kim to get Mao's approval before starting the war. Four months into the war, when MacArthur was able to reverse North Korea's gains, Stalin was almost ready to accept a lost war. Weary from the entire course of events he commented, "So what. Let it be. Let the Americans be our neighbors."⁶⁰ Although Stalin was energized by Mao's designs to enter the war, he nevertheless was not committed enough to the war to provide Soviet air cover when Mao badly needed it a few days later. Moscow undoubtedly sought Beijing's support in Korea, but it is a stretch to argue Mao was a puppet of Stalin's overall Communist strategy or that his influence came to dominate the PRC's decision calculus.

Conclusions

In reality, the PRC regarded the ensuing crisis as both an opportunity and a challenge. If Beijing could meet the challenge posed by the world's greatest power, it would accomplish both its domestic and international aims. Domestically, it would

⁵⁸ Wingrove, "Who Started Korea?," 44.

⁵⁹ Gaddis, *The Cold War*, 42. See also Wingrove, "Who Started Korea?," 45.

⁶⁰ Gaddis, *The Cold War*, 45.

bolster the Politburo's authority to rule while also enabling the transformation of Chinese society through revolution. Internationally, it would leave no doubt on the world stage that China had reemerged as a central great power.⁶¹ Though China did not usher in a new world order as it had hoped, its spoiler strategy proved to have many benefits. By the time the Korean War ended in 1953, the transformation of Chinese society that Mao sought was nearly complete. He had destroyed resistance to his regime and consolidated his power. His redistribution of wealth had destroyed the landlord class, and leadership within the CCP had been re-blued or removed. The Communist state now tightly controlled the national bourgeoisie and the CCP reeducated intellectuals in Communism. The CCP's authority and legitimacy was now unquestioned amongst the Chinese people.⁶²

In Mao's eyes, success in the international arena was equally as momentous. Despite the stalemate, the massive expenditures of money and lives, the forfeiture of Formosa, and the added dependence on the Soviets, Mao continuously referred to the Korean War as a great victory. China had confronted the West and emerged undefeated. "China's performance in Korea enhanced the image of Beijing as a leader in the revolutionary struggle against Western domination in Asia and other parts of the world."⁶³ Mao was at the helm of a real great power, and one that could not be cast aside lightly.

However, China failed to spoil the international order through revolution. In recklessly pursuing the interests of his state, in disregard of international norms, Mao made short term gains but damaged China's credibility to act as a responsible great power in the future. He believed that through worldwide revolution, "Communist China would no longer be bound by any existing norms and codes of behavior in international relations."⁶⁴ Korea was the gateway that would open up a new world order for him. In retrospect, "South Korea in and of itself was of little importance to the global balance of power, but the fact that it had been invaded so blatantly—across the 38th parallel, a boundary sanctioned by the UN—appeared to challenge the entire structure of the

⁶¹ Chen, *China's Road to the Korean War*, 219.

⁶² Chen, *China's Road to the Korean War*, 221.

⁶³ Chen, *China's Road to the Korean War*, 221.

⁶⁴ Chen, *China's Road to the Korean War*, 214.

postwar collective security.”⁶⁵ It was still fresh in the minds of diplomats the world over that something eerily similar had led to the collapse of international order in the 1930s. Therefore, the international community, and especially the West, came to view China with suspicion for many years to come.

⁶⁵ Gaddis, *The Cold War*, 43.

CHAPTER 3

The Mature Supporter State

After the Cold War ended, scholars and foreign policy analysts debated whether the US should strive to create a hegemonic, institutional, or great power concert international order.¹ Immediately following the Cold War, the US was primarily concerned that its attempts to maintain hegemony would provoke counterbalancing from other states. However, since the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq started, it has shifted its concern toward persuading other states to adopt a US-led form of global governance.² Even though China seldom undertakes behavior in direct opposition to the US-led order, it occasionally opts out of following US leadership. For example, China stood by North Korea after the sinking of the South Korean corvette ROKS *Cheonan* and the shelling of Yeonpyeong Island despite outcries from the international community.³ Because the US cannot unilaterally uphold a stable international order, actions from China that run counter to stability are a cause for concern. “Although the United States can act alone, it cannot succeed on such issues as controlling terrorism, curbing proliferation of weapons of mass destruction (WMD), rebuilding failed states, or maintaining economic stability without help from other states.”⁴ China is chief among states whose support is critical to the stable functioning of international order. This chapter will analyze the relevant history

¹ Deborah Welch Larson and Alexei Shevchenko, "Status Seekers: Chinese and Russian Responses to U.S. Primacy," *International Security* 34, no. 4 (2010), 63. For hegemony see Michael Beckley, "China's Century?: Why America's Edge Will Endure," *International Security* 36, no. 3 (2011), For institutionalism see Ikenberry, *After Victory*. For concert of great powers, see Richard N. Rosecrance, *The New Great Power Coalition: Toward a World Concert of Nations* (Lanham, MD.: Rowman & Littlefield, 2001),

² Robert A. Pape, "Soft Balancing against the United States," *International Security* 30, no. 1 (2005), See also Christopher Layne, "The Unipolar Illusion Revisited: The Coming End of the United States' Unipolar Moment," *International Security* 31, no. 2 (2006); Schweller and Pu, "After Unipolarity."

³ John Delury, "Triple-Pronged Engagement: China's Approach to North Korea," *American Foreign Policy Interests* 34, no. 2 (2012), 70.

⁴ Larson and Shevchenko, "Status Seekers: Chinese and Russian Responses to U.S. Primacy," 64. See also the NSS statement that the strengthening of international norms is not a task of the United States alone. Office of the President of the United States, "National Security Strategy of the United States," 3.

of China's interaction with North Korea over its nuclear program to draw conclusions regarding whether China is likely to act as a supporter of the existing order, or shirk its responsibilities.

Bound to Lead?

With North Korea's continual defiance of the US-led international order, China's relationship with the secretive regime has gained much attention since North Korea's withdrawal from the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) in January of 2003. The North Korean problem is of particular importance to the existing liberal order because it represents a chink in the armor of both the US and the US-led order. President Barack Obama highlighted this fact when he said "the single biggest threat to US security, short-term, medium-term, and long-term, would be the possibility of a terrorist organization obtaining a nuclear weapon."⁵ Because the US appears to be nearly impenetrable from a conventional standpoint, state and non-state actors alike have tried to leverage asymmetric options such as nuclear weapons and terrorism.⁶ David Kilcullen points out that "no other country, or combination of countries, could expect to take on the United States in a conventional force-on-force engagement with any prospect of victory."⁷ US defense spending highlights the great asymmetry in power that the military holds. For example, US defense spending in 2008 comprised 70 percent of the total global defense spending.⁸ US military power has driven asymmetric warfare to the forefront of international consciousness. For the US to reverse asymmetric trends such as nuclear proliferation and violent extremism, it must rely on international alliances and partnerships to help support order regionally.⁹

⁵ Eric Schmitt and Thom Shanker, *Counterstrike: The Untold Story of America's Secret Campaign Against Al Qaeda* (New York: Times Books, 2011), 6.

⁶ Audrey Kurth Cronin, *How Terrorism Ends: Understanding the Decline and Demise of Terrorist Campaigns* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009), 198.

⁷ David Kilcullen, *The Accidental Guerrilla: Fighting Small Wars in the Midst of a Big One* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 22.

⁸ See www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/spending.htm for current figures. In 2012, the US spending dropped to 35 percent of global defense spending as the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan come to a close while China simultaneously pours money into their defense spending.

⁹ Kilcullen, *The Accidental Guerrilla*, 15.

Without a united front against troublesome international behavior such as nuclear proliferation and terrorism, US intervention throughout the world is likely to become more frequent. In turn, continual US intervention in situations better handled by responsible regional powers decreases US legitimacy and is ultimately destabilizing to the existing order.¹⁰ For the sake of a stable international order, it is important that China use its great power status to shape North Korea's spoiler behavior and rhetoric. North Korea has demonstrated both the will and the capability to smuggle nuclear materials and technology beyond its borders.¹¹ The world, and especially the US, is watching China closely to observe whether or not it will use its power and influence responsibly with North Korea and whether it will act in a manner that is stabilizing and supporting to the existing order. Thus North Korea's spoiler behavior is directly tied to the need for China's supporter behavior. Although it is too soon to determine if China will indeed play the role of supporter, we can infer that it no longer appears set on a spoiler strategy.

To begin, a useful framework for analyzing the China-North Korea relationship is to look at the DPRK's history of defying international norms, then understand the basics of the NPT as the regime that establishes those norms, and lastly, to evaluate China's response as either shirker or supporter behavior. North Korea significantly elevated its spoiler behavior when it withdrew from the NPT. Allegations surfaced in October 2002 that North Korea was covertly enriching uranium. Pyongyang subsequently announced that it had "reactivated its plutonium facilities at Yongbyon" in January 2003, and was withdrawing from the NPT.¹² North Korea has largely acted irresponsibly with its nuclear program since its inception in 1967 when the Soviet Union supplied it with a research reactor.¹³ In 1994, its irresponsible behavior became more public when it

¹⁰ See Bull's discussion of domination, primacy, and hegemony. Bull, *The Anarchical Society*, 207-209. Kilcullen, *The Accidental Guerrilla*, 24.

¹¹ Sheena Chestnut, "Illicit Activity and Proliferation: North Korean Smuggling Networks," *International Security* 32, no. 1 (2007). For North Korea's nuclear dealings with Pakistan and Syria see Richard Weitz, "Parsing China's North Korea Policy," *World Politics Review* (February 2013).

<http://www.worldpoliticsreview.com/articles/12726/global-insights-parsing-china-s-north-korea-policy>.

¹² Chestnut, "Illicit Activity and Proliferation: North Korean Smuggling Networks," 80.

¹³ Seung-Ho Joo, *Gorbachev's Foreign Policy Toward the Korean Peninsula, 1985-1991: Power and Reform* (Lewiston, N.Y.: E. Mellen Press, 2000), 205.

threatened to withdraw from the NPT. At that time, Washington appeased Pyongyang with the 1994 Agreement Framework which kept the DPRK under the umbrella of the NPT. Under the 1994 framework, North Korea agreed to “discontinue pursuit of a covert nuclear weapons program in exchange for two proliferation-resistant nuclear power reactors.”¹⁴ However, while the reactors were under construction, the Korean Peninsula Energy Development Organization (KEDO) discontinued the program in response to Pyongyang’s failure to meet the conditions of the agreement.¹⁵ Despite failing to meet the framework’s requirements, the DPRK cited US failure to uphold its end of the bargain as its reason for withdrawing from the NPT in 2003.¹⁶ From that point, international initiatives toward denuclearization in North Korea have been replete with periods of crisis, stalemate, and tentative progress. However, the dominant trend has been a continual pursuit of nuclear weapons while occasionally paying lip service to denuclearization. On October 9, 2006, North Korea tested its first nuclear weapon while Six-Party Talks were still ongoing.¹⁷ The DPRK subsequently tested nuclear weapons on May 25, 2009 and again on February 12, 2013.¹⁸ If the history of North Korea’s nuclear program can be generalized, it is single-mindedness toward development of nuclear weapons. Regardless of what Pyongyang may say publically to assuage international fears or gain concessions, it appears to have no intentions of returning to the NPT or abiding by the international norms contained therein.

The NPT contains legally binding non-proliferation commitments and was designed to stop the spread of nuclear weapons while also building international cooperation to that end. President Obama affirmed that the core bargain and purpose of the treaty still remains sound today: “countries with nuclear weapons will move toward disarmament; countries without nuclear weapons will not acquire them; and all countries can access peaceful nuclear energy.”¹⁹ The NPT was originally ratified in 1970 and

¹⁴ Davenport, "The U.S.-North Korean Agreed Framework at a Glance".

¹⁵ Davenport, "The U.S.-North Korean Agreed Framework at a Glance".

¹⁶ Habib, "North Korea's Nuclear Weapons Programme and the Maintenance of the Songun System."

¹⁷ Habib, "North Korea's Nuclear Weapons Programme and the Maintenance of the Songun System" 52.

¹⁸ Davenport, "The U.S.-North Korean Agreed Framework at a Glance".

¹⁹ Davenport, "The U.S.-North Korean Agreed Framework at a Glance".

presently contains the signatures of all countries other than North Korea, India, Pakistan, Israel, and South Sudan. Every five years, the Treaty is reviewed by all signatories and provides the parties an opportunity to assess whether the purposes and provisions of the Treaty are being realized in its current form. At that time, proposals for change may be submitted and voted upon.²⁰ However, rather than proposing changes, North Korea first threatened to withdraw from the NPT in 1994 and then became the only country in history to actually do so in 2003.²¹

China has been one of the primary players in dealing with the North Korean nuclear crisis.²² It hosted the Six-Party Talks that first convened in August of 2003 to address North Korea's continued pursuit of nuclear weapons. After the DPRK's withdrawal from the NPT in 2003, the US, China, South Korea, Russia, and Japan engaged North Korea about its nuclear program via the Six-Party Talks. According to the US State Department, the Six-Party Talks were held in the spirit of mutual respect and equality for "the cause of peace and stability on the Korean Peninsula and in Northeast Asia at large...through the verifiable denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula in a peaceful manner."²³ While North Korea eventually agreed to give up its nuclear program in 2007 in exchange for fuel oil and food aid, the apparent success was short-lived. International suspicions of default were realized in late 2008 when North Korea refused to allow the International Atomic Energy Commission to continue to conduct inspections.²⁴ From that point, the Six-Party Talks were never resumed, but it is more China's role in the talks than their actual success or failure that is important here.

Washington has been vocal about its desire for Beijing to wield influence over its long-term ally in Pyongyang. Moreover, the US seeks a willingness on China's part to accept a supporter role in upholding the existing international order along with its

²⁰ International Atomic Energy Commission, "Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons."

²¹ International Atomic Energy Commission "IAEA and DPRK".

²² R. Pacheco Pardo, "China and Northeast Asia's Regional Security Architecture: The Six-Party Talks as a Case of Chinese Regime-Building?," *East Asia* 29, no. 4 (2012), 338.

²³ US State Department, "Six-Party Talks, Beijing, China," (2005), <http://www.state.gov/p/eap/regional/c15455.htm>.

²⁴ Glenn Kessler, "Far-Reaching U.S. Plan Impaired N. Korea Deal: Demands Began to Undo Nuclear Accord," *The Washington Post* (September 26, 2008), A20.

associated norms and institutions. In the US National Security Strategy (NSS), President Obama indicated that the US “welcomes a China that takes on a responsible leadership role in working with the US and the international community to advance [global] priorities.”²⁵ Specifically, the NSS calls upon China to help underwrite “the collective action that can serve common interests such as combating violent extremism, stopping the spread of nuclear weapons, and securing nuclear materials.”²⁶ The NSS reiterates several times that the US desires a cooperative relationship with China based on “mutual interest and mutual respect.”²⁷ However, Washington has been hesitant to trust China with greater international rights until it has proven itself willing to take on greater international responsibilities, such as the provision of the aforementioned public goods. As Washington engages Beijing on the provision of these public goods, it seeks China’s “commitment to an international order based upon rights and responsibilities.” The US seeks to facilitate in China “a broader voice” and “more effective representation” in international institutions in exchange for China’s contributions to nuclear security and other public goods.²⁸ Thus, the vision outlined in the NSS aligns closely with Hedley Bull’s depiction of the rights and responsibilities of great powers.

The US does not place the responsibility of solving the nuclear crisis in North Korea on China alone. Rather, it expects China to partner with other great powers such as the US in forcing North Korea to make a strategic choice within the international community. The choice Pyongyang faces is to “abide by international norms, and achieve the political and economic benefits that come with greater integration within the international community; or refuse to accept this pathway, and bear the consequences of that decision, including greater isolation.”²⁹ President Obama inferred China’s help with

²⁵ Office of the President of the United States, "National Security Strategy of the United States," 43.

²⁶ Office of the President of the United States, "National Security Strategy of the United States," 3.

²⁷ Office of the President of the United States, "National Security Strategy of the United States," 11.

²⁸ United States Department of State and Agency for International Development, "Quadrennial Diplomacy and Development Review," (Washington, DC: Dept. of State, 2010), 13. See also NSS, 3.

²⁹ Office of the President of the United States, "National Security Strategy of the United States," 11.

North Korea when he made it clear that enforcing this strategic choice would require a multilateral effort. “When nations breach agreed international norms, the countries who espouse those norms must be convinced to band together to enforce them.”³⁰ According to the Department of Defense, the US places a “very high priority” on gaining “cooperation from China and Russia on arms control and nonproliferation,” as reflected in the new 2010 START treaty.³¹ Washington is “working to build a deeper and more effective partnership” with Beijing, but needs China to “play a more substantial and constructive role” in bringing North Korea in line with international norms.³²

From Spoiler to Supporter

While the US seeks a China that exhibits “responsible international behavior” in the management of international affairs, it has instead witnessed a China with a history of undermining international sanctions by providing North Korea with aid.³³ America’s three primary strategic direction documents emphasize, on ten separate occasions, the US expectation for China to act as a “responsible” great power.³⁴ Washington has made its expectations of Beijing clear: act as a responsible great power in supporting international norms through the pursuit of a “comprehensive nonproliferation and nuclear security agenda, grounded in the rights and responsibilities of nations.”³⁵ Undoubtedly, a major concern in the nuclear security agenda is bringing sufficient influence to bear on North Korea so as to get the DPRK to align its behavior with the international norms laid out in the NPT. China, as North Korea’s greatest ally and trade partner, is clearly a critical link in normalizing the DRPK’s behavior, if that is even possible.

³⁰ Office of the President of the United States, "National Security Strategy of the United States," 13.

³¹ United States Department of Defense, "Quadrennial Defense Review," (Washington, DC: Dept. of Defense, 2010), 42.

³² Office of the President of the United States, "National Security Strategy of the United States," 3. See also Department of Defense, "Quadrennial Defense Review," 17.

³³ Department of State and Agency for International Development, "Quadrennial Diplomacy and Development Review," 48.

³⁴ Office of the President of the United States, "National Security Strategy of the United States," 3, 13, 29, 43, 46, 59. Department of State and Agency for International Development, "Quadrennial Diplomacy and Development Review," 20, 48a, 48b.

Department of Defense, "Quadrennial Defense Review," 31.

³⁵ President, "National Security Strategy of the United States," 2.

While China has historically eschewed this role with its ally, “Beijing’s [recent] leadership in building a new security regime in the region suggests a change on Chinese perspectives regarding its role within the broader East Asia’s regional security architecture.”³⁶ In past years, China has been largely passive with regard to its involvement in supporting security regimes in Northeast Asia. However, in recent years China has taken a leadership role in shaping a more institutionalized security, emphasizing the importance of regimes such as the NPT.³⁷ As North Korean leader Kim Jong Un continued to make bombastic threats such as “high profile” retaliation against the US, Chinese President Xi Jinping has taken an internationally welcomed stand against North Korea’s bellicosity. Leading up to the DPRK’s February 12 nuclear test, Xi referred to the North’s nuclear program as “intolerable.”³⁸ After the nuclear test, he expressed what appeared to be veiled criticism of Pyongyang when he said, “no one should be allowed to throw a region and even the whole world into chaos for selfish gains.”³⁹ Although Xi did not mention North Korea specifically in his address, the context surrounding North Korea’s nuclear test and impetuous rhetoric strongly suggest that Xi was reprimanding North Korean leadership.

Despite recent encouraging trends from Chinese leadership, many policymakers in America are calling for China to take a stronger stance against the renegade country. For example, Republican Senator John McCain said “Chinese behavior has been very disappointing [concerning] their failure to rein in what could be a catastrophic situation.”⁴⁰ McCain was referring to the strange brew of recent North Korean actions including its latest nuclear test, a state-produced video of a missile blowing up the White House, mass deployment of troops along the southern border, and a warning to diplomats in North Korea to leave because of rising tensions. Referencing these events, Democratic

³⁶ Pacheco Pardo, “China and Northeast Asia’s Regional Security Architecture: The Six-Party Talks as a Case of Chinese Regime-Building?,” 337.

³⁷ Pacheco Pardo, “China and Northeast Asia’s Regional Security Architecture,” 338.

³⁸ A. Gary Shilling, “Containing the North Korean Threat,” *Business Week –New York*, no. 4315 (2013), 8.

³⁹ William Wan, “Chinese President Xi Jinping Expresses Concern Over North Korea’s Rhetoric,” *Washington Post* (April 7, 2013),

http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/china-expresses-concern-over-north-korea-tensions/2013/04/07/ffa01ea6-9f62-11e2-9c03-6952ff305f35_story.html.

⁴⁰ Wan, “Chinese President Xi Jinping Expresses Concern Over North Korea’s Rhetoric.”

Senator Charles Schumer agreed with McCain on China stating that “it’s about time they stepped up to the plate and put a little pressure on this North Korean regime.”⁴¹ These statements are an apparent microcosm of a consensus in Washington that China can and should do more. Although Pyongyang’s recent uptick of inflammatory rhetoric is cause for concern, “the overriding issue for the United States is North Korea’s nuclear weapons program—as a military threat (from Seoul and Tokyo to Alaska and Hawaii), as proliferation risk (from Syria to Myanmar), and moral hazard (if Pyongyang gets to keep its bomb, is not Tehran next?).”⁴²

Unquestionably, it is the DPRK’s nuclear program that is cause for greatest concern among American policymakers. Making matters worse, they have good reason to fear China is merely paying lip service to the need for North Korean reform. Historically, China has opposed harsh economic sanctions, and has consistently undermined UN sanctions against North Korea by continuing to provide them food, fuel, and financing. For instance, after North Korea’s 2006 nuclear test, Premier Wen Jiabao signed off on UN sanctions in May, but was in Pyongyang by October to celebrate friendship between the two countries and announce large-scale economic cooperation.⁴³ China defends its actions by characterizing them as “development and humanitarian activities” which are not actually prohibited by the UN sanctions regime.⁴⁴ So, although Beijing “has been willing to criticize North Korean behavior and temporarily reduce economic assistance,” it has been consistently unwilling to pursue “military action, severe economic sanctions, and other developments that could threaten instability on the Korean Peninsula.”⁴⁵ At times China has gone so far as to blame US intransigence for North Korea’s response, citing America’s uncompromising policies as the source of the conflict rather than North Korea’s defiance of international norms.⁴⁶

⁴¹ Wan, "Chinese President Xi Jinping Expresses Concern Over North Korea's Rhetoric."

⁴² Delury, "Triple-Pronged Engagement," 69.

⁴³ Delury, "Triple-Pronged Engagement," 73.

⁴⁴ Jayshree Bajoria and Beina Xu, "The China-North Korea Relationship," *Council on Foreign Relations Backgrounder* (March 2013), <http://www.cfr.org/china/china-north-korea-relationship/p11097>.

⁴⁵ Weitz, "Parsing China's North Korea Policy".

⁴⁶ Shilling, "Containing the North Korean Threat," 8.

Though China has undermined tough UN sanctions over the years by providing North Korea a lifeline, it has nevertheless supported the UN sanctions that followed North Korea's three nuclear tests in 2006, 2009, and 2013. In 2006, China endorsed UN Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1718 which imposed sanctions on North Korea. In 2009, after North Korea's second nuclear test, China called Pyongyang's actions "brazen" and subsequently agreed to the terms of UNSCR 1874, which ratcheted up the terms of the sanctions. Again, in 2013, China supported even harsher sanctions on North Korea via UNSCR 2094, summoning the North Korean ambassador to its foreign ministry to protest the nuclear test. However, each of these sanctions included a clause stating that "measures imposed by this resolution are not intended to have adverse humanitarian consequences for the civilian population of the DPRK."⁴⁷ China has maneuvered adeptly in this grey area to keep supply lines open to North Korea and prevent the regime from collapsing.

America should not be surprised by the seemingly inconsistent responses that have characterized China's approach to North Korea. China and the US have fundamentally different priorities concerning the state. Two months after North Korea's most recent nuclear test, Secretary of State John Kerry echoed President Obama's stance by stating that denuclearization is America's top priority concerning North Korea.⁴⁸ To achieve that goal, China must play an integral role in helping to break the Kim regime's irresponsible pathology of saber-rattling, followed by international concessions, followed by silence, followed by more saber-rattling. The tone of Obama's 2010 NSS was clearly one of cooperation and peace with China, and Secretary Kerry pressed that message further when he met with China's top leaders. While in China, Kerry asked them to use their "enormous influence" over North Korea to "help make a difference" in the denuclearization of the Peninsula.⁴⁹ At a dinner with President Xi and Premier Keqiang,

⁴⁷ Bajoria and Xu, "The China-North Korea Relationship".

⁴⁸ Barack Obama and Xi Jinping. "Readout of the President's Phone Call with Chinese President Xi Jinping", March 14, 2013. See also Michael Gordon, "Seeking China's Help on Korea, Kerry Makes Arms Overture," *New York Times* (April 13, 2013), http://www.nytimes.com/2013/04/14/world/asia/kerry-in-china-seeking-help-on-north-korea.html?hp&_r=0. See also Delury, "Triple-Pronged Engagement: China's Approach to North Korea," 69.

⁴⁹ Gordon, "Seeking China's Help on Korea, Kerry Makes Arms Overture".

Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi responded to Kerry saying that China was committed to “the denuclearization process on the Korean Peninsula,” but stressed that it “should be handled peacefully through dialogue and consultation.”⁵⁰ In spite of Beijing’s verbal commitment to denuclearization, it does not appear to be Beijing’s top priority with North Korea.

When it comes to Beijing’s priorities with Pyongyang, nearly all experts on the region agree that “Chinese officials value stability above all else.”⁵¹ China remains extremely worried that “getting tough” with North Korea by applying any sort of substantial pressure will lead to the regime’s collapse, and has repeatedly emphasized that message to American, South Korean, and Japanese diplomats.⁵² China has good reason to worry about instability in North Korea. According to Richard Weitz, a Council of Foreign Relations expert on the region, the sudden demise of the North Korean regime could have several catastrophic effects on the whole region. The North’s collapse would likely bring widespread economic disruptions in East Asia; generate a humanitarian disaster with refugees fleeing into China; erode China’s influence by ending Beijing’s unique status as mediator with Pyongyang; redirect the US military focus onto other Asian interests such as Taiwan; tie up resources that South Korea would have otherwise invested in China; and potentially remove the buffer between China and US ground forces. Worse yet, war on North Korean soil could spill over into Chinese territory, potentially drawing China into another Korean war.⁵³ The instability in North Korea is akin to a mutual hostage situation in which China feels forced to prop up the truculent Kim regime in spite of ongoing destabilizing and irresponsible behavior by the North.

⁵⁰ Gordon, "Seeking China's Help on Korea, Kerry Makes Arms Overture".

⁵¹ Wan, "Chinese President Xi Jinping Expresses Concern Over North Korea's Rhetoric". For other regional experts who have written extensively on China’s desire for stability in North Korea see: Tae-Seop Bahng, "US-China Conflicts and the Korean Peninsula," *SERI Quarterly* 6, no. 1 (2013); Gordon, "Seeking China's Help on Korea, Kerry Makes Arms Overture"; Weitz, "Parsing China's North Korea Policy"; Bajoria and Xu, "The China-North Korea Relationship"; Jane Perlez, "Some Chinese Are Souring on Being North Korea's Best Friend," *New York Times* February 17, 2013.

⁵² Gordon, "Seeking China's Help on Korea, Kerry Makes Arms Overture".

⁵³ Weitz, "Parsing China's North Korea Policy". Bahng and Lander also discuss several of the negative impacts that would arise from the collapse of North Korea.

Although stability is Beijing's top priority in North Korea, China also places great importance on secondary priorities such as denuclearization. Beijing's fear is not without merit that "South Korea, Japan, and even Taiwan might be induced to pursue their own nuclear forces" if Kim becomes capable of targeting them with nuclear weapons.⁵⁴ Moreover, Beijing has no assurance that North Korean nuclear weapons will not someday pose a threat to China. Regardless of how serious this secondary priority of denuclearization may seem, Beijing prefers to use dialogue and diplomacy to solve the problem rather than more forceful methods of coercion.

Beijing's resistance to a harsher stance against Pyongyang highlights a tertiary priority in China, that of maintaining a friendly relationship with North Korea. Despite what by all accounts appears to be a growing frustration with Kim Jong Un's actions, China has taken deliberate steps to keep lines of communication open and has refrained from sharply criticizing the young dictator. This is due in large part to Beijing not wanting to appear impotent in dealing with its much smaller brother-in-arms. However, it also reflects the fact that China derives certain benefits from North Korea. For example, official Chinese documents show that its trade with North Korea reached \$6 billion in 2011, in which Chinese exports accounted for 70 percent of the total.⁵⁵ China also gets a higher price for its fuel exports to North Korea than it does from any other country. Additionally, China gets preferable trading terms, preferable port operations, and inexpensive labor from North Korea because of the growing number of Chinese firms investing there. Not only does China benefit economically from its ally, but North Korea's allegiance also provides an important "bulwark against US military dominance of the region."⁵⁶ Consequently, stability, trade, and the existence of a military buffer all figure powerfully into Beijing's foreign policy vis-à-vis Pyongyang, making it very difficult for the secondary priority of denuclearization to override the status quo.

Mismatched priorities between Beijing and Washington have led to considerable frustration on both sides of the Pacific. The US is still technically at war with North Korea and has predicated peace talks on the North's willingness to forgo nuclear

⁵⁴ Weitz, "Parsing China's North Korea Policy".

⁵⁵ Bajoria and Xu, "The China-North Korea Relationship".

⁵⁶ Bajoria and Xu, "The China-North Korea Relationship".

weapons. North Korea's response has been that it will give up its nuclear weapons only after all other countries with nuclear weapons give up theirs. Furthermore, the DPRK has recently stated that the agreements and principles surrounding the Six-Party Talks are now null and void.⁵⁷ The US has had little influence in curbing North Korea's insatiable appetite for nuclear weapons so it has largely shifted its strategy to one of reliance on China.⁵⁸ Although the US has had almost no success in influencing North Korea, there is a sense that if China united with the US in purpose, their combined ability to shape events around the globe would be almost limitless. Thus, according to US thinking, China's refusal to get tough with North Korea has forestalled any and all attempts by the US to influence the rogue nation.

Even if Washington and Beijing did see eye-to-eye concerning the appropriate actions to levy against Pyongyang, it is doubtful whether Beijing would be able to change North Korea's stance on nuclear weapons.⁵⁹ Western analysts have often asserted that UN sanctions cannot force change in North Korea without China's wholehearted support. However, Beijing maintains its stance that the international community overestimates the amount of influence that China has over its secretive and repressive neighbor. Recent evidence seems to favor China's assessment of their limited influence when it comes to North Korea's nuclear program. China engaged North Korea in multiple attempts to persuade the Kim regime to forgo both its 2006 and 2013 nuclear tests, but those pleas fell on deaf ears.⁶⁰

North Korea's intractable response is unsurprising given the fact that it views nuclear weapons as necessary to the survival of the Kim regime. The DPRK's development of its nuclear program has spanned several decades, and "at no stage has Pyongyang shown a commitment to its dismantlement."⁶¹ Furthermore, North Korea has come to understand that it can use denuclearization negotiations to perpetuate its surprisingly efficacious bargaining cycle of provoking crises in order to make new

⁵⁷ Shilling, "Containing the North Korean Threat," 8.

⁵⁸ Delury, "Triple-Pronged Engagement: China's Approach to North Korea," 69.

⁵⁹ Habib, "North Korea's Nuclear Weapons Programme and the Maintenance of the Songun System," 44.

⁶⁰ Wan, "Chinese President Xi Jinping Expresses Concern Over North Korea's Rhetoric".

⁶¹ Habib, "North Korea's Nuclear Weapons Programme and the Maintenance of the Songun System," 43.

demands and gain international leverage. In light of these facts, one can infer that the DPRK's nuclear program holds great value as a bargaining chip both internationally and domestically.⁶² Internationally, it has been successful in extracting economic benefits for its waning economy while also serving as a deterrent to any would be aggressors. Domestically, it has provided "a rallying symbol of the country's hyper-nationalist ideology," setting up the US and South Korea as resident evils. Consequently, it is unlikely that Pyongyang will give up its nuclear program any time soon, at least not while it continues to espouse "military first" as its overriding grand strategy.⁶³

For the sake of argument, it is a useful exercise to assume that China could in fact influence North Korea's decision to undertake nuclear disarmament. If it were indeed possible to influence North Korea's decision calculus, China could enforce tougher sanctions by cutting off virtually all external fuel, food, finance, and arms to the country. Historically, China has been North Korea's chief supplier accounting for 90 percent of its fuel imports, 80 percent of its consumer goods, and 45 percent of its food.⁶⁴ North Korea imports the remainder of its fuel from Iran.⁶⁵ Following North Korea's first nuclear test in 2006, fuel stopped flowing to North Korea via China's Dandong pipeline. Although China blamed the oil stoppage on a maintenance malfunction within the pipeline, North Korea nevertheless appeared to be sufficiently influenced to resume Six-Party Talks shortly thereafter.⁶⁶ Because China publically denies that it used fuel restrictions as part of a diplomatic effort to get North Korea to reengage in the Six-Party Talks, it is difficult to assess whether that was in fact the reason North Korea came back to the negotiating table. However, it seems reasonable to conclude that North Korea is susceptible to sanctions by China, even if Pyongyang intended its acquiescence to be only temporary. Beyond the most damaging options of restricting oil and food aid to North Korea, China

⁶² Gordon, "Seeking China's Help on Korea, Kerry Makes Arms Overture".

⁶³ Habib, "North Korea's Nuclear Weapons Programme and the Maintenance of the Songun System," 49.

⁶⁴ Bajoria and Xu, "The China-North Korea Relationship".

⁶⁵ Joseph Kahn, "China May Be Using Oil to Press North Korea," *New York Times* (October 31, 2006), A12.

⁶⁶ J. Joo-a Lee, "To Fuel or not to Fuel: China's Energy Assistance to North Korea," *Asian Security* 5, no. 1 (2009), 45. See also Kahn, "China May Be Using Oil to Press North Korea," A12 and Elizabeth Economy, "Beijing's North Korea Problem."

could also place severe limitations on the amount of business it brings into North Korea. Mounting evidence shows that Chinese businessmen are growing disillusioned by the poor treatment they receive from North Korea, to include Pyongyang's demand that Chinese enterprises build their own roads and supply their own electricity.⁶⁷ In sum, it is possible that China has more influence on North Korea than they give themselves credit for, but whether that influence would ever translate into denuclearization in the North remains a source of doubt. Furthermore, China's claim that tougher sanctions may provoke collapse in the North appears to be well-founded.

Jin Qiangyi, Director of the Center for North and South Korea Studies at Yanbian University, captured this seemingly no-win situation well when he stated that "China's options have reached an impasse. For now China chooses to maintain the situation in North Korea, not because it wants to prop up the North Korean government but because it doesn't see another choice."⁶⁸ With stability in North Korea as its number one priority, China sees tougher sanctions as antithetical to their goals, and thus, diplomacy as the only option. Beijing believes that a policy of "neighborly engagement" is the only sensible way forward if it is to maintain any diplomatic influence over Pyongyang.⁶⁹ The irony in the international community's call for China to "get tough" with North Korea is that China is the only country with any influence there precisely because it has not gotten tough with North Korea. Regardless of China's past attempts at neighborly engagement, there appears to be a shift in the previously monolithic Chinese policy of magnanimity toward the DPRK. Factions within the CCP are speaking out against North Korea's nuclear program and Chinese public support for the oppressive Kim regime is fading.⁷⁰ Thus, China faces a difficult decision on whether to continue what appears to the outside world as a failed strategy of diplomacy or risk the collapse of North Korea through tougher sanctions. As one expert on the region put it, "in the world of 'first-class power' and high-stakes foreign policy, you don't get points for trying, only for succeeding."⁷¹

In Lieu of Conclusions

⁶⁷ Perlez, "Some Chinese Are Souring on Being North Korea's Best Friend," 12.

⁶⁸ Perlez, "Some Chinese Are Souring on Being North Korea's Best Friend," 12.

⁶⁹ Delury, "Triple-Pronged Engagement: China's Approach to North Korea," 72.

⁷⁰ Delury, "Triple-Pronged Engagement: China's Approach to North Korea," 71.

⁷¹ Economy, "Beijing's North Korea Problem".

As political strategists attempt to predict China's response to North Korean provocations surrounding its nuclear program, it will be important for them to reflect on China's past responses dispassionately instead of engaging in wishful thinking. China's future strategy is likely to be one of engagement with North Korea and strategists will likely have to learn to work around that reality. Americans and South Koreans have a long history of being unable to separate themselves from their own preferences for a "tough" approach when it comes to diplomacy with North Korea. This has hampered their ability to see China's approach on its own terms.⁷² Beijing has been the guarantor of the status quo on the Korean Peninsula since the Middle Ages, which is exemplified by its wartime involvement in the 1590s, 1890s, and 1950s.⁷³ China's approach to North Korea today appears to follow similar logic as it persists in supporting the status quo. Beijing will likely continue to take whatever measures are required to ensure North Korea does not collapse.

It is essential for Western strategists and statesmen to recognize that China is not shirking its international responsibilities, as some suppose, simply because it does not take a harder line with North Korea. Beijing believes that it is acting responsibly by preventing the collapse of North Korea. The counterargument focuses on the inconvenient fact that "neighborly engagement" from Beijing is akin to supporting spoiler behavior from the Kim regime. However, a closer analysis reveals that Beijing supports the DPRK less and less out of a perception of mutual interests and more and more out of a perception of being trapped by a "mutual hostage situation." In light of major efforts to engage North Korea and the international community on this issue, it is a stretch to label China's behavior as shirker behavior rather than simply as a difference of opinion on how best to handle its recalcitrant neighbor. Consequently, even though Beijing enthusiastically supports the international community's desire for denuclearization in North Korea, it feels as though the risks associated with collapse are too great to pursue hard sanctions. Instead, China has tried to show the world that it can best support international order by maintaining the status quo in North Korea.

⁷² Delury, "Triple-Pronged Engagement: China's Approach to North Korea," 70.

⁷³ Delury, "Triple-Pronged Engagement: China's Approach to North Korea," 73.

CONCLUSIONS

The monikers “spoiler,” “shirker,” and “supporter” provide a useful framework to think about the central question: Can China learn to behave like an ordinary great power? The premise of the argument laid out here is that China is a great power; great power is a role, and therefore, China can and will play one of the three roles outlined above. Will it behave as a responsible supporter of the existing order? The PRC climbed onto the great power stage in lockstep with its entry into the Korean War. Mao Zedong led his fledgling communist country into war in the hope of not only aiding the revolution of Kim Il Sung, but also in the hope of sparking worldwide revolution. Spoiling the existing world order and ushering in a new one was fundamental to his vision. Over the next 50 years, tensions with the US gradually ameliorated while China simultaneously grew in power.

The new millennium ushered in new challenges for Beijing as it sought influence over North Korea’s developing nuclear program. Although China agreed in principle that the DPRK should undertake nuclear disarmament, it felt its influence over the Kim regime was insufficient to force their hand. The international community looks to China, as Pyongyang’s greatest ally and largest trading partner, to resolve the nuclear crisis in North Korea. However, because China prioritizes stability in North Korea over denuclearization, it has been reluctant to impose crippling sanctions on the Kim regime. Some believe China is shirking its responsibilities as a great power, calling into question its ability to act as an ordinary great power in supporting the existing international order. Others point to Beijing’s leadership role in the Six-Party Talks and argue that China is perhaps more committed than anyone to solving the problem, but has chosen a non-Western approach. Whether more diplomacy or tougher sanctions is a more efficacious strategy for China to pursue is a debate that has yet to reach wide resolution.

China’s Evolution

Although the US may be frustrated with China over what it perceives to be a shirker response concerning North Korea, American policymakers would benefit from taking a long view of China’s development over the past 60 years. Strategic patience with China may pay large dividends if the US can encourage China to continue to change and become further integrated into the international system. As one indicator of China’s willingness and ability to change, one need look no further than how its foreign policy

has evolved over the past 60 years from one dominated by competition to one seeking cooperation.¹

China's foreign policy in the 1950s was *yibiandao*, “allying with the Soviet Union to resist the United States.” It was replaced in the 1960s by *fandui dixufan*, “opposing both Soviet revisionism and American imperialism.” The 1970s brought yet another new policy of *yitiaoxian*, “aligning with the United States to counter the Soviet threat.” These sorts of mutually exclusive strategies characterized China's foreign policy until the 1980s when it began to adopt cumulative strategies. Cumulative strategies added to the previous policy instead of replacing it. The 1980s brought the first cumulative strategy, *duli zizhu waijiao*, “independent and autonomous diplomacy” toward the US and Soviet Union. In the 1990s, China added *mulin waijiao*, “friendly neighbor diplomacy” to its 1980s policy. For the 2000s, China further added *heping fazhan*, “peaceful development” to the mix. Most recently, it has inaugurated *hexie shijie*, “attaining a harmonious world” into its multi-faceted foreign policy stance.²

China's cumulative foreign policies over the past 30 years highlight its progression away from conflict toward a more cooperative assimilation into the existing order. Even as China has grown in relative power over the past few decades it has adopted defensively-minded foreign policies designed to: “blunt destabilizing influences from abroad, avoid territorial losses, reduce its neighbors' suspicions, and sustain economic growth.”³ As China's foreign policy has evolved, it has simultaneously become more deeply integrated into the international system and sought to carve out a “global role that serves Chinese interests but also wins acceptance from other powers.”⁴ Thus, China's evolving foreign policy provides the US a window into China's intentions as the two countries attempt to promote stability in their relations with one another.

¹ Chung, "Decoding the Evolutionary Path of Chinese Foreign Policy, 1949-2009: Assessments and Inferences," 176-177.

² Chung, "Decoding the Evolutionary Path of Chinese Foreign Policy, 1949-2009: Assessments and Inferences," 176-177.

³ Andrew J. Nathan and Andrew Scobell, "How China Sees America," *Foreign Affairs* 91, no. 5 (2012), 33.

⁴ Nathan and Scobell, "How China Sees America," 33.

Conflict is not Predetermined

The future of China's foreign policy will likely be a product of the evolving dynamics of US-China relations. "A widely subscribed view as to the impact of China's rise forewarns the inevitability of Sino-American competition or confrontation."⁵ This largely pessimistic view arises from the realist logic that China's rise, regardless of its intentions or preferences, will inevitably crowd the maneuver space for American strategy abroad, thereby producing acute conflict. However, others have argued that China's rise may be a peaceful one, following in the footsteps of America's rise.⁶ Importantly, both states get a say in which path they follow.⁷

The US and China have the option of treating some states as allies and others as adversaries, some with Hobbesian policies and others with Kantian ones. The interests of each state changes depending on how each views things: through a Hobbesian lens it sees confrontation; through a Kantian one, cooperation. Consequently, "it is not necessary to assume that international systems are all Hobbesian all the time," nor is it necessary to apply that logic to a Kantian worldview either.⁸ Rather, they are varied and nuanced. Thus, "there is no natural reason to think that the United States and China are imprisoned in a Hobbesian relationship any more than they might be freed in a [Kantian] one."⁹ The way each state sees and therefore behaves toward the other becomes a self-fulfilling

⁵ Chung, "Decoding the Evolutionary Path of Chinese Foreign Policy, 1949-2009: Assessments and Inferences," 184.

⁶ Chung, "Decoding the Evolutionary Path of Chinese Foreign Policy, 1949-2009: Assessments and Inferences," 184. See also Robert S. Ross and Feng Zhu, *China's Ascent: Power, Security, and the Future of International Politics* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2008), and Zhiqun Zhu, *US-China Relations in the 21st Century Power Transition and Peace* (London: Routledge, 2006).

⁷ Both Bull and Wendt show that the society of states play a large role in what kind of order develops. The decisions that states make matter. When it comes to great powers, the order they pursue is typically the order they get. Bull, *The Anarchical Society*, 48-56. See also Alexander Wendt, *Social Theory of International Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2006), 308, 313.

⁸ Forsyth, "What Great Powers Make It," 9. For additional detail on Hobbesian and Kantian worldviews, see Wendt, *Social Theory of International Politics*, 247, 313.

⁹ Forsyth, "What Great Powers Make It," 11.

prophecy.¹⁰ “International systems are not predetermined. They are the result of interaction, socialization, and power.”¹¹

Socialization is an important concept and an important process for the US to understand and encourage as it seeks a more cooperative China. “Socialization is in part a process of learning to conform one’s behavior to societal expectations and [in part] a process of identity and interest formation.”¹² China becomes more socialized by the existing international system the more it interacts and develops interdependencies within it. In the last 20 years, China has become increasingly involved in international institutions while also witnessing the “demise of Communist ideology.”¹³ Thus, socialization has changed China’s behavior through increased compliance with institutions and has changed its identity through reduced commitment to communist ideology. As China moves further away from a zeal for communism, it will be less apt to instinctively defend it against anyone seen as threatening to it.¹⁴ Thus, the process of socialization in the existing liberal order is a strong force that may continue to pull the US and China toward cooperation if their identity and interests become increasingly aligned. This, of course, assumes that China acknowledges the legitimacy of the existing order and continues to move toward a supporter role.

Therefore, it is important that the US draw China deeper into the existing order through engagement rather than push them away through containment. Whichever perspective, Kantian or Hobbesian, the US and China adopt has major implications globally. The outcome resides as much with the US as it does with China. Thus US-China interaction is critical. If they adopt a perspective of confrontation, countries in the region will have to choose who they will side with economically and militarily. Echoing the voices of many leaders in East Asia, a senior Indonesian statesman told his American counterpart, “don’t leave us and don’t make us choose.”¹⁵ If a spirit of cooperation and

¹⁰ Wendt, *Social Theory of International Politics*, 331, 368.

¹¹ Forsyth, "What Great Powers Make It," 11.

¹² Wendt, *Social Theory of International Politics*, 170.

¹³ Chung, "Decoding the Evolutionary Path of Chinese Foreign Policy, 1949-2009: Assessments and Inferences," 179-182.

¹⁴ Wendt, *Social Theory of International Politics*, 337.

¹⁵ Henry Kissinger, "The Future of U.S. - Chinese Relations: Conflict is a Choice, Not a Necessity," *Foreign Affairs* 91, no. 2 (2012), 47.

peace is adopted instead, Asia, and by extension the globe, may witness a period of unprecedented stability and prosperity. From the time the US policy of détente toward China started in 1972, America has had a long-standing foreign policy characterized by engagement with the Chinese. However, the Bush and Obama administrations have moved closer to a containment philosophy, with the most recent example being the “Pivot to Asia.”

Is ‘Pivot’ the Right Word?

If conflict with China is not a forgone conclusion, then the US should be circumspect in how it chooses to engage in East Asian affairs. In 2012, President Obama announced his rebalancing strategy from the Middle East toward Asia, which he entitled the “Pivot to Asia.” Mired in one of the country’s worst economic crises, Obama largely intended the “pivot” to assuage the fears of allies that the US might abandon the region, thus reassuring them that Washington was committed to the region’s stability.¹⁶ East Asian countries have had mixed reactions to America’s shift in foreign policy. Like the aforementioned Indonesian official, many countries in East Asia appreciate America’s economic and military support in the region, but “aspire to good relations with both China and the United States and will resist any pressure to choose between the two.”¹⁷ However, China predictably reacted to America’s rebalance as “gratuitous, expansionist, and threatening.”¹⁸ Robert Ross, a prolific Harvard writer on Chinese foreign policy argues that the “pivot” toward Asia is creating a self-fulfilling prophecy, whereby U.S. policy “unnecessarily compounds Beijing’s insecurities and will only feed China’s aggressiveness, undermine regional stability, and decrease the possibility of cooperation between Beijing and Washington.”¹⁹

The pivot to Asia, in parallel with increased US activity on China’s periphery, has China worried. Admiral Samuel Locklear, Commander of US Pacific Command, lent additional weight to Ross’s argument in his testimony to the House Armed Services Committee in March 2013. “The Chinese characterize our rebalance as militarily heavy,

¹⁶ Robert S. Ross, “The Problem with the Pivot,” *Foreign Affairs* 91, no. 6 (2012), 75.

¹⁷ Kissinger, “The Future of U.S. - Chinese Relations: Conflict is a Choice, Not a Necessity,” 51.

¹⁸ Ross, “The Problem with the Pivot,” 78.

¹⁹ Ross, “The Problem with the Pivot,” 72.

aimed at containing them, and [they believe] it has ‘emboldened’ regional actors such as the Philippines and Japan against them, generating regional instability.”²⁰ Since the Cold War ended, strategic engagement has been the cornerstone of US policy toward China, but recent trends have led Beijing to conclude that the US has abandoned its former strategy for a new one. The great irony in the pivot is that what was meant to be a hedge on China’s rise and a reassurance to regional allies has instead caused anxiety among the allies and sparked combativeness in China while simultaneously damaging its faith in cooperation. As Ross points out, “the pivot has already damaged US security interests, and the cost will only grow. If Washington continues down its current path, Chinese resistance to US policies will inevitably increase, preventing bilateral cooperation on crucial issues from trade to global economic stability.”²¹

If “pivot” is not the right word, the strategy’s underlying commitment to a renewed focus in Asia is a step in the right direction. The Obama Administration has recently taken steps to assuage Beijing’s fears with both diplomatic and military efforts. Both governments are honoring the 2011 Obama-Hu Jintao agreement to “build a cooperative partnership,” as evidenced by more than 60 diplomatic dialogues each year.²² Perhaps more importantly, the US is stepping up its military engagement with China in an effort to reduce misperceptions.

In April 2013, General Martin Dempsey, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, spent four days in China meeting with his counterpart, Shigeru Iwasaki, in an attempt to improve communication between the American and Chinese militaries.²³ The US military also invited the Chinese military to participate in the Rim of the Pacific Exercise in 2014 for the first time in history as “an important step in fostering greater trust and openness in the bilateral military-to-military relationship.”²⁴ Generally, military analysts and planners across the globe have a tendency to exaggerate “potential threats even when they do not

²⁰ House, *US Pacific Command Posture: Hearings before the Subcommittee on Armed Services* (113th Cong., 1st sess., 2013).

²¹ Ross, “The Problem with the Pivot,” 81.

²² House, *US Pacific Command Posture: Hearings before the Subcommittee on Armed Services*.

²³ Lander, “Detecting Shift, U.S. Makes Case to China on North Korea,” A4.

²⁴ House, *US Pacific Command Posture: Hearings before the Subcommittee on Armed Services*.

objectively exist.”²⁵ However, military-to-military engagement can be an extremely effective means of developing amity rather than enmity. The 2011 US National Military Strategy stated that it expects deeper military cooperation with China to “expand areas of mutual interest and benefit, improve understanding, reduce misperception, and prevent miscalculation.”²⁶ These military efforts demonstrate that both countries recognize the importance of their relationship to stability in the Pacific region and beyond. Even though the US and China do not always see eye-to-eye, efforts like these to understand one another will likely pay handsome dividends in the long run.

Avoiding Misunderstandings, Misperceptions, and Mistakes

Mutual understanding is integral to the question of whether China can learn to behave like a responsible great power. China’s adoption of an enthusiastic supporter role will be predicated on its view of the US-led order. For China to be a supporter, it must view the existing order as legitimate and worthy of its support. Because the order is characterized by unipolarity, the US must take the initiative in delegating responsibility to China. China has spent half a century feeling encircled by hostile powers, always concerned about what it perceived to be a US quest for global hegemony.²⁷ It will be difficult for Beijing to break this mindset. On the heels of the “century of humiliation,” many in Beijing are dominated by the unsettling belief that the US is holding them back from playing their historic role as the Middle Kingdom.²⁸ Dominant voices in China propagate a vision that the US is on an “ideological crusade to enlarge democracies and subvert states that oppose US foreign policy... [and] is increasingly willing to use military coercion in pursuit of political and economic goals.”²⁹ However, China does not have the market cornered on suspicions and grievances. The US also brings complaints against China that include human rights abuses, oppression of American Christians,

²⁵ David L. Shambaugh, “China’s Military Views the World : Ambivalent Security,” *International Security* 243, no. 1, (1999), 77.

²⁶ Department of Defense, “US National Military Strategy,” 14.

²⁷ Shambaugh, “China’s Military Views the World: Ambivalent Security,” 62.

²⁸ Kissinger, “The Future of U.S. - Chinese Relations: Conflict is a Choice, not a Necessity,” 46.

²⁹ Shambaugh, “China’s Military Views the World: Ambivalent Security,” 62. See also Nathan and Scobell, “How China Sees America,” and Ross, “The Problem with the Pivot.”

egregious environmental practices, rampant piracy and counterfeiting, and cyber espionage.³⁰

For a cooperative approach to work, one that deeply integrates China into the international system, both countries will have to challenge their preconceptions. They will have to do the hard work of understanding one another through increased dialogue and engagement. That hard work will be mutually beneficial if they can “create a new equilibrium of power that maintains the current world system, but with a larger role for China.”³¹ As the US encourages China to accept this new equilibrium, it should continue to advocate its views on issues such as human rights and push its core interests such as the rule of law, regional stability, and open economic competition. As China continues to rise, it will push back to find the boundaries of US will. In turn, Washington will push back to establish clear boundaries. However, this give and take should be done in a way that does not threaten each other’s security, showing “cool professionalism, not rhetorical belligerence.”³²

Henry Kissinger, the American diplomat with the most diplomatic visits to China than any other statesmen, said that the situation calls “not for an abandonment of American values, but for a distinction between the realizable and the absolute.”³³ When Washington and Beijing ruminate on how to assert their own values and interests, they “both have the responsibility to take into account the other’s nightmares,” understanding that rhetoric, as much as policies, feed into the other’s suspicions.³⁴ According to Kissinger, China’s nightmare is military encirclement as well as outside intervention into its domestic institutions. He goes on to assert that America’s greatest fear is of being pushed out of Asia by an exclusionary bloc.³⁵ Thus, as each country considers its absolute objectives, it should give equal consideration to what is realizable given the other

³⁰ Nathan and Scobell, “How China Sees America.” 44.

³¹ Nathan and Scobell, “How China Sees America,” 45.

³² Nathan and Scobell, “How China Sees America,” 46.

³³ Kissinger, “The Future of U.S. - Chinese Relations: Conflict is a Choice, Not a Necessity,” 50.

³⁴ Kissinger, “The Future of U.S. - Chinese Relations: Conflict is a Choice, Not a Necessity,” 50.

³⁵ Kissinger, “The Future of U.S. - Chinese Relations: Conflict is a Choice, Not a Necessity,” 51.

country's fears. If a cooperative approach is important, America cannot encircle China militarily to ensure it will not be pushed out of Asia. Likewise, China cannot try to push the US out of Asia in order to ensure that it will not be encircled by the US military.

A policy of active engagement by the US can reconcile China's fear of hegemony and military encirclement while giving the US increased legitimacy in the region. Both sides must come to understand each other's activities as a "normal part of international life and not in themselves a cause for alarm."³⁶ The US made the mistake of "losing China" once before when it would not recognize the fledgling country as a nation; it should take care not to repeat that mistake by refusing to acknowledge China's legitimate place in the world 60 years later. Actively engaging China requires a stance that recognizes China's place as a great power and fosters America's legitimate relations with it.

Parting Thoughts

Admittedly, the two case studies represented here are insufficient to definitively assert whether or not China is likely to act as a responsible great power in the future. However, they are sufficient to suggest that China is moving away from the spoiler side of the ledger and closer to the supporter side. Whether changes in China's foreign policy reflect short or mid-term tactical choices for the purposes of expedience or reflect an actual change in philosophy and ideology remains to be seen. Jae Ho Chung, a Chinese scholar who conducted an in-depth study of Chinese foreign policy from 1949 through 2011, is in general agreement with the argument presented here. He insists that China's view of international relations has changed markedly since the day of Mao. Their foreign policy has gone through a "grand transition" in which it has become much more pragmatic rather than ideological, and much more "committed to international norms and...the international community."³⁷ Furthermore, China's use of force as an instrument of power as steadily decreased since the Maoist era when it acted on the tenet that "the

³⁶ Kissinger, "The Future of U.S. - Chinese Relations: Conflict is a Choice, not a Necessity," 55.

³⁷ Chung, "Decoding the Evolutionary Path of Chinese Foreign Policy, 1949-2009: Assessments and Inferences," 175, 179.

best deterrence is belligerence.”³⁸ In the past 10 years, China’s ever increasing involvement in institutions provides a strong impetus for it to continue to act peacefully toward Taiwan.³⁹ As time goes on, it will become increasingly clear whether China intends to act as an enthusiastic supporter of the existing order, but for the time being, the historic trend is a positive one.

When modern-day China emerged in 1949, one of the first communiqües that Stalin sent Mao was one that espoused international duty and responsibility. Stalin wrote, “There should be some division of labor between us...The Soviet Union cannot...have the same influence [in Asia] as China is in a position to do...By the same token, China cannot have the same influence as the Soviet Union has in Europe. So, for the interests of the international revolution, you may take more responsibility in working in the East...and we will take more responsibility in the West...In a word, this is our unshirkable duty.”⁴⁰ If one substituted “United States” for “Soviet Union” and “order” for “revolution,” one gets the idea: Cooperation is an essential ingredient of international life. For it to become reality, however, requires work. China can be brought into the society of states; it can learn to become a responsible great power and a supporter of an international order in which it enjoys many benefits. But this is not pre-ordained, which is why more research is required on this important question.

³⁸ Whiting, “China’s Use of Force, 1950-96, and Taiwan,” 104, 131. See also Chung, “Decoding the Evolutionary Path of Chinese Foreign Policy, 1949-2009: Assessments and Inferences,” 180, and Shambaugh, “China’s Military Views the World: Ambivalent Security.”

³⁹ Whiting, “China’s Use of Force, 1950-96, and Taiwan,” 131.

⁴⁰ Gaddis, *The Cold War*, 39.

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